

TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 9

Papas, First Head Of The Church In Asia

The Nestorian Christians are the small, but venerable, remnant of a once great and influential Christian church. They are the oldest of Christian sects; and, in their better days, were numerous through all the vast regions from Palestine to China; and they carried the gospel into China itself. 1

IN THE stories of Vigilantius and Patrick a survey was made of the true church in central Europe and in Ireland. The story of Papas (spelled Papas by Smith and Wace, Papa by Wigram, Phapas by others) takes us eastward to a vast, densely populated region which was already the home of unnumbered Christian churches. When Papas was chosen supreme head of the Church of the East in 285, no general director of an extensive Christian organization had before been thought of as far as history shows. Papas was a contemporary of Lucian, and like him, a forerunner of Patrick and Vigilantius. From the facts related in this chapter, one can see that these latter two must have been strongly influenced in their work by the experience of Papas and the Church of the East.

In the story of Papas an attempt is made to tell when and where the Church of the East was organized. As this church arose it was faced with strong counterfeit religions. The Church of the East is often called the Assyrian Church because it lies in the territory once called Assyria. This region stretches along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where once were the ancient realms of Assyria and Babylon. This church is many times wrongly called the Nestorian Church. And because Seleucia, its headquarters, is only about forty miles from the former city of Babylon, it has been termed the Church of Babylon, and also the Chaldean Church.

Papas was chosen to be the head of the new organization when all the world was astir. The greatness of his vision meant much to the Church in the Wilderness. At the time of his election, he had been church director in the region lying around Seleucia. The creation of the new office elevated him from provincial director to the position of head over all the Church of the East. The unity abiding in that body was so strong that the directors of church provinces from Assyria to China confirmed this choice, recognizing and submitting to the supreme authority of Papas. He came to influence Syrian, or Assyrian, Christianity when a leader was needed who would not only direct the growing work in the Orient, but also show how the Church of the East should relate itself to Christianity in Europe. Papas is recognized as a learned man, versed in Persian and Syrian literature. 2

Transforming Heathenism Without Being Transformed

Only a hundred years after the death of the apostle John, the Assyrian Christians had planted their churches among the Parthians, Persians, Medes, Bactrians, Scythians, Turks, and Huns. 3 One circumstance which made this possible was the conversion of thousands of listeners on the Day of Pentecost who returned with the gospel to the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Arabians, and dwellers in Mesopotamia. (Acts 2:9-11.) The truths of Christianity broke down entrenched polygamy among the Parthians. Their church doors were opened only to those Parthians who had but one wife. The "motions of sin in the flesh" vanished in the converts who walked no longer after the flesh, but after the spirit. Among their Persian converts, they had found incest universally practiced. Fathers married their daughters, and sons took their mothers to wife. This practice was part of Zoroastrianism, the

state religion. 4 The anger of the state, as well as the wrath of the mobeds, the Magian priests, was brought down on anyone who spoke against it. All this was changed among the Christians.

Preaching the high standards of the New Testament also elevated the industrial life of the Medes, Bactrians, Huns, and Scythians. The powers of darkness fell before the children of light! Bardesanes, writing about 180, puts it this way:

We are called Christians by the one name of the Messiah. As regards our customs our brethren abstain from everything that is contrary to their profession, e.g., Parthian Christians do not take two wives. Jewish Christians are not circumcised. Our Bactrian sisters do not practice promiscuity with strangers. Persians do not take their daughters to wife. Medes do not desert their dying relations or bury them alive. Christians in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit fornication but keep them apart and commit them to the judgment of God. Christians in Hatra do not stone thieves. 5

Particular attention is called to the statement in the foregoing quotation, "Jewish Christians are not circumcised." This refutes the charge that Christians who sanctified Saturday also practiced circumcision.

The successes of the Assyrian Christians among the Scythians constituted a moral revolution. That vast, undefined region, lying north and east of the Black and Caspian Seas, generally known as Scythia, was a cradle of nations. Over and over again, successive waves of fierce warriors drove westward through the civilized parts of Asia. Often they settled in the territory they conquered and founded new kingdoms.

One Scythian tribe in particular may be noted. It seized the territory of northwestern India, which was then ruled by the successors of Alexander the Great, and founded the Kushan dynasty (A.D. 45-225). It had in its list several notable kings, one of which, fervently devoted to Buddhism, called a famous council of Buddhist priests with the intent of promoting unity among the monks and of converting the whole world to the new religion of India. One chief object sought in this conference was to bring uniformity among the Buddhist monks on the observance of their weekly sabbath. A world convention held at Vaisali reveals how the Old Testament had impressed upon Buddha and his followers the weekly observance of a sacred day. Of this council Arthur Lloyd writes:

Was it permissible for brethren belonging to the same community to keep the sabbaths separately?... We can see how strong was the current of party feeling from the question about the sabbath. The opposing parties could evidently no longer meet together for the joint celebration of the customary observances, and the tension between the monks of the east and the west was very great. 6

Thus it is plainly seen how the field had been prepared for the coming of Christianity.

The missionaries from Assyria did not recoil from entering the kingdoms founded by the Scythians in India and Scythia, nor did they fail to persevere in their attempts to evangelize the numerous tribes to the north. They pitched their tents alongside these wandering peoples on the plains of Tartary. There they planted thousands of Christian centers and achieved marvelous successes in missionary endeavors. 7

Seleucia, Headquarters of the Church

To understand the might of the Church of the East over which Pappas was elected first supreme head, consideration should be given to the twin cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the first center of this strong organization. It must be remembered that in the days of the apostles it was the Parthian Empire which lay east of Syria and Asia Minor. This empire was destined to endure for nearly five hundred

years (250 B.C. to A.D. 226). It continued long enough to see the Romans come up and subjugate the weak successors of Alexander. The Romans, however, dreaded a clash with the Parthians because of their crushing cavalry. Had the Parthians put down Zoroastrianism, a religion which had been strong and crafty and determined to rule the state since the days of the Persian Empire, and had the Parthians been more avaricious of power, they might have continued to be dreaded conquerors.⁸ But they failed to do this. The Persians overthrew them in 226, and the new empire also set up its capital at Seleucia. When Papas was elected supreme leader of the church, he moved its headquarters there. Thus during the centuries that Seleucia and Ctesiphon comprised the seat of government, first of the Parthians and then of the Persian Empire, New Testament believers looked to this place as their earthly spiritual center. ⁹

It was a region to stir the imagination. Not far from the churches along the Euphrates River the ark had rested after the Flood, and in this land the sons of Noah had laid the foundations of the Babylonian Empire. Near by, Abraham and his fellow pilgrims had paused as they journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan. Had the apostle John in his old age visited Edessa, he would have seen one of the fairest and most progressive cities of his day. ¹⁰

Assyrian Church Leaders Before Papas

The century and a half between the death of the apostle John and the time of Papas was full of interest for the believers in the east. Not only there, but also in the west, movements of vast import were taking place in the Christian world. Because of Parthia's tolerant spirit, no iron monarchy held the nations of the Middle East in its viselike grip as the Roman Empire held Europe. The roads were open for the youth who bade father and mother farewell as they responded to the Macedonian call. Travelers paused at the famous cities of Edessa or Arbela as they passed on their way from the Celts of Ireland to the Celts of Turkestan or Mongolia. Neither the hoarfrosts in the tableland nor the monsoons of India could restrain the zealous evangelists of the Syrian missions. In their hands they held that fountain of inspiration, the Peshitta, the Syriac translation of the Bible. Burkitt says: "The place that is occupied among English-speaking Christians by the Authorized Version is occupied in the Syriac churches by the Peshitta."¹¹ That version was to have a circulation nearly as great as the Authorized Version in the West. The Christians memorized it, they recited it, they sang it. Mongolian, Manchu, Tartar, Hindu, Malay, and Filipino heard with astonishment the message as it fell from their lips.

The tolerant attitude of the Parthian Empire, until its overthrow in 226, facilitated freedom of movement. No favored religion drove the state to inaugurate persecution. It is true that Zoroastrianism in its homeland of Persia proper was arrogant. Nevertheless, although it was powerful, it was not considered at this time as the imperial religion, the *religio licita*, of this region.

The subkingdom of Adiabene, being under the Parthian Empire, was permitted to live its own life. However, the five successive provincial directors in this realm before Papas suffered for their faith. ¹² Samson was put to death because of the opposition of the Zoroastrians. His successor, Isaac, was imprisoned for some time in a pit because he had sheltered a prominent man who was a convert from Magianism. At the time of Noah (A.D. 163-179), the Zoroastrians invented a new and despicable kind of persecution. Kidnapping the daughters of the Christians, they sought to win from the maidens some expression favorable to their religion of sun worship. Once that was done, they claimed these children as converts and took them into a life of captivity.

A royal decree of toleration was about to be issued when the death of the Parthian monarch frustrated its publication. The last directing pastor in Adiabene spans the closing years of the Parthian Empire. Then came the vast movement to elect a head of the entire Church of the East. There must have been considerable stir when Pappas was chosen. 13 This united action brought together spiritual leaders from many large church provinces and thus new life and hope were brought to the believers from Syria to China.

Toward the end of the second century, while the Christians of the East were busily pushing the work of evangelization from Asia Minor to Scythia, they were suddenly startled by the order from Victor I, bishop of Rome, excommunicating them. In clinging to certain practices, they followed the Scriptures; they had been adverse to the novel theories and practices which their brethren in the Roman Empire had been introducing. The subtle spiritual dangers to the true church in the West were more threatening than the physical dangers assailing the Church of the East. To understand this first usurpation whereby the ecclesiastical power at Rome alienated eastern Christians, a short explanation is necessary.

Separation of the Churches

A division between church members who sought world leadership and those who humbly followed Jesus was growing in Europe. The majority of writings of Christian authors acceptable to the West, which have come down to us from the centuries immediately following the apostles, reflect the mixture of Christianity and pagan philosophy. This is especially true of the allegorizing teachers and graduates of the church college at Alexandria.

Many eminent theologians, particularly Protestant, speak against accepting the writings of the so-called apostolic fathers with too much authority. Augustus Neander says that they have "come down to us in a condition very little worthy of confidence." 14 John L. Mosheim testifies that they all believed the language of the Scriptures to contain two meanings, the one plain, the other hidden; that they attached more value to the hidden meaning, thus throwing obscurity over the Sacred Writings. 15 Archdeacon Frederic W. Farrar writes: "There are but few of them whose pages are not rife with errors." "Their acquaintance with the Old Testament is incorrect, popular, and full of mistakes. 16 While Martin Luther, who had studied deeply into the writings of those allegorizing, mystical church fathers, declared that God's word when it is expounded by them is like straining milk through a coal sack. 17 Adam Clarke testifies that "there is not a truth in the most orthodox creed, that cannot be proved by their authority, nor a heresy that has disgraced the Romish Church, that may not challenge them as its abettors." 18

In the second century the aims of the sun-worshipping emperors and those of the Alexandrian theologians ran parallel. There was an ambitious scheme on foot to blend all religions into one of which "the sun was to be the central object of adoration." 19 Speaking of the influence of pagan philosophy on early church writers, Schaff says, "We can trace it...even in St. Augustine, who confessed that it kindled in him an incredible fire." 20

Approving in their hearts the conciliating attitude of the pagan emperors and the mass methods of Alexandria's evangelism, the bishops of Rome decided to eclipse any public attraction which pagan festivals could offer. Seated in the empire's capital, from the height of their pedestal of influence, they determined to bring together Easter, a yearly festival, and Sunday, a weekly holiday sacred to the worship of the sun, to make the greatest church festival of the year.

The controversy over Easter, which was to rage for centuries, now began. God had ordained that the Passover of the Old Testament should be celebrated in the spring of the year on the fourteenth day of the first Bible month. Heathenism in the centuries before Christ had a counterfeit yearly holiday celebrating the spring equinox of the sun. It was called "Eostre" from the Scandinavian word for the goddess of spring, from which we get our word "Easter." Since the resurrection of Christ had occurred at the time of the Old Testament Passover, a custom developed of celebrating it yearly, though neither Christ nor the New Testament provided for it. ²¹ This rivaled the pagan spring festival. However, the fourteenth day of the month of the Passover could fall, as now, on any day of the week. The eastern churches celebrated the resurrection of Christ annually two days after the Passover feast. They commemorated the resurrection on whatever day of the week the sixteenth day of the month fell. This was in harmony with the way the Bible regulated the Old Testament Passover feast.

In addition to their yearly spring festival at Eastertime, sun worshipers also had a weekly festival holiday. As was previously pointed out, the first day of the week had widespread recognition as being sacred to the sun. The bishop of Rome, seeking to outrival pagan pomp, assaulted those churches which celebrated Easter as a movable feast. He determined to force Easter to come on the same day of the week each year, namely, Sunday. ²²

By this he would create a precedent which only a devout and scholarly opposition could oppose. By this he would appeal to the popular prejudices of his age, be they ever so incorrect. By this he would claim to be the lord of the calendar, that instrument so indispensable to civilized nations. By this he would assert the right to appoint church festivals and holy days. By this he would confuse and perplex other church communions, more simple and scriptural than he. Only those who have read carefully the history of the growth of papal power will ever know how powerfully the controversy concerning Easter served in the hands of the bishops of Rome.

Victor I, the bishop of Rome, assembled provincial synods up and down the Mediterranean coasts to come to an agreement on the date of Easter. Clement, at the head of the school of Alexandria, brought decision in favor of Rome's attitude by publishing a summary of traditions he had collected in favor of Sunday observance.²³ Clement went further. There is no record of a writer daring to call Sunday the Lord's day before him. This Clement did. At the same time Victor proclaimed it to all the nations around the Mediterranean. He knew that the pagans would agree to a fixed yearly spring festival and that those Christians who were becoming worldly would do the same. Therefore, he issued his decree ordering the clergy everywhere to observe Easter on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. A lordly command issuing from one bishop over others was something new in the world. Christian clergy, up to that time, had had their provincial synods. Generally, they had followed the decrees obtained by a majority vote in these regional gatherings. Never before Victor I, had any bishop dared to pass over the head of the provincial synods to command other clergy to obey his decrees. The shock was so astonishing and the resistance to it so pronounced that the historian Archibald Bower describes this assumption of power as "the first essay of papal usurpation." ²⁴

The Church of the East answered the lordly requisition, declaring with great spirit and resolution that they would by no means depart from the custom handed down to them. Then the thunders of excommunication began to roar. Victor, exasperated, broke communication with them, pronounced the clergy of the East unworthy of the name of brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church at Rome. ²⁵ Here was a gulf created between the eastern and the western churches, a gulf

which widened as the bishop of Rome grew in power. When Papas was elected as supreme head over the Assyrian communion, he found himself and his church anathematized, excommunicated.

Zoroastrianism Attacks the Church

The Church of the East, excommunicated by the West, was left alone to work out its own destiny. In addition to lying under the ban of Rome, it constantly encountered the persistent opposition of Zoroastrianism, the state religion of Persia, the home of its origin. Zoroaster was the founder of Zoroastrianism, which in its later development was called Mithraism. When the attention of a traveler in Persia today is directed to the fire temples which dot the land, he is at once convinced of the former power of Zoroastrianism. Many ruins of these famous fire temples can be found on the Iranian plains. 26 The traveler may likewise visit Malabar Hill, Bombay, India, the well-known spot where the Parsees, descendants of the ancient faith of Persia, dispose of their dead. His chief interest will not be in those cement towers of silence on which the vultures perch, ready to feast upon the lifeless human bodies. He may gaze instead in rapt meditation upon the temple where the robed priest sits near the sacred flame, feeding it sandalwood. The Parsees fled to India after the rapid advance of the armies of the newly born Mohammedanism had struck down the great Persian Empire. They took with them, they claim, the sacred flame. Until their exodus, Persia had been bound together by the almost invincible religion of Mithra, sun-god of Zoroastrianism.

With its alluring philosophy, its deities connected by interesting fantasies with the movements of the stars and planets, its sacred books, its chanted music, its intriguing mysteries, its holy days, and its white-robed hierarchy, Mithraism held sway over the Parthian and Persian Empires for many centuries until its conquest by Mohammedanism in 636. It all but seized the Roman Empire in its permanent grip.

Zoroaster's Imitation of Bible Doctrines

Historians have been astonished by the remarkable similarity between the religion of the Bible and the entrancing mysteries from the Iranian tableland. While these writers are divided over the facts concerning Zoroaster, we will present strong evidence to show that he, like other certain worldwide religious imposters, appears on the pages of the past as a counterfeiter of the Old Testament in general and in particular of the fertile visions granted to the prophet Daniel. The reader will be interested in the statements now offered.

The learned Prideaux speaks plainly of Zoroaster's activities, as a subordinate of the prophet Daniel who was a prime minister of both the Babylonian and Persian Empires. After discussing the different theories of superficial writers concerning this Persian religious mystic, he writes:

But the Oriental writers, who should best know, all unanimously agree, that there was but one Zerdusht or Zoroastres; and that the time in which he flourished, was while Darius Hystaspes was king of Persia...it must therefore be Daniel under whom this imposter served.... And, no doubt, his seeing that great, good, and wise man arrive at such a height and dignity in the empire, by being a true prophet of God, was that which did set this crafty wretch upon the design of being a false one.... All which plainly shows the author of this doctrine [Zoroastrianism] to have been well versed in the sacred writings of the Jewish religion out of which it manifestly appears to have been all taken; only the crafty imposter took care to dress it up in such a style and form, as would make it best agree with that old religion of the Medes and Persians, which he grafted it upon.²⁷

The above hypothesis is supported by the following statements from E. A. Gordon, an Orientalist of wide renown. In reading these testimonies we must remember that Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah were brought up together as boys and as prophets were prophesying at the same time. Thus, we can see more clearly the possible contacts of Zoroaster with Daniel.

"Note that the Persian sage, Zoroaster, is said to have conferred with Jeremiah, another prophet of the Hebrew exile."

"In the fifth century B.C. Ezekiel gives a wonderful account of the caravan traffic with Tyre in his day, which was also that of Confucius, Lao-tzi, Gautama Buddha, and Pythagoras." 28

In answer to those historians who advocate the hypothesis that the Persian imposter was a legendary character, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says the following about Zoroaster: "It can no longer be doubted that Zoroaster was a real historical personage. The attempts of some scholars to represent him as a mythical being have failed, even though much that is related about his life is legendary, as in the case of Buddha." 29

So marked is the similarity between the visions of Daniel and the dreams of Zoroaster that some Biblical commentators who lean toward modernism have suggested that Daniel copied his visions from the Persian prophet. Others have confused him with the prophet Daniel. Other writers have thought that both had a common origin, and that the truths of the Old Testament, particularly the prophecies of Daniel, either came from Zoroastrians or were adopted from the Old Testament by Zoroaster.³⁰

The following doctrines from the prophet Daniel reappear in the teachings of Zoroaster: one supreme God, the coming of the Messiah, the existence of angels and their revelations to man,³¹ the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all mankind, and Adam and Eve - the first parents. There is a collection of "sacred" volumes - writings composed by Zoroaster - which was called the *Book of Abraham*. The same observances about meats, clean and unclean, are found as were given to Moses. There are commands for the payment of tithe, the ordaining of one high priest over all, and references to Joseph, Moses, and Solomon in the same way as they are presented in the Old Testament. Zoroaster also hated idolatry.

As the Jews had a visible Shekinah of glory, indicating the presence of God in the temple, so Zoroaster taught his priests to behold in the sun and the sacred fire in the fire temples, the dwelling place of their supreme god. Zoroaster also instituted a priesthood similar to the Jewish priesthood.

In the larger fire temples the priests watched in relays and fed the sacred flame throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. The druidesses of pagan Ireland and the vestal virgins of pagan Rome, both vowed to perpetual virginity, kept the sacred temple fires continually burning for centuries.³²

Zoroaster arranged the performance of his religion so that it was accompanied by pomp and color. The priests were arrayed in long, white robes and had tall, peaked caps upon their heads. They marched in procession on the stated days of solemn assemblies. Everything was done to make their services impressive. On these occasions libations were poured on the ground, sacred hymns were sung, and portions of the sacred writings of Zoroaster were read. For financial support they received offerings, and also possessed considerable endowments.³³

The revelations of the Old Testament had disclosed the Trinity. "In a disfigured and uncouth semblance" Zoroaster proclaimed his species of a trinity.³⁴ He placed at the head of his celestial hierarchy Ormazd (or Ahura-Mazda), the great wise spirit, and Ahriman, the supreme evil spirit, who was the coeval and rival god of darkness dwelling in the bottomless pit of night. With them he associated in a marked way, Mithra, the god of light, who was the sun and an embodiment of sun worship. As the sun was neither in the heavens nor on earth, but swung in an intermediate position between heaven and earth, so Mithra was the great mediator. When Mithraism had overspread the Roman Empire, Mithra was said to be the champion of sinners, the companion after death, and the guide of the soul into the heaven of heavens.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther had witnessed the domination of the cult of Zoroaster in the Persian Empire. The same religion captivated province after province of the Roman Empire until, through the popularizing of its sun-god, Mithra, it threatened to stifle Christianity.

The devotion to Mithra was astonishingly far-reaching. A long line of Mithraea, or temples of the god, stretched from southern France along the Rhine River, extending over into the territory of the Germanic tribes. Perhaps no political divisions of the state did more to bring glory to the Oriental deity than the Germanic provinces of the empire. The city of Rome itself abounds with the monuments of Mithra.³⁵ It is an evidence of the great strength of Mithraism that pagan Rome, and later papal Rome, was seen surrendering to the religion of the Persians, its enemies.

It was difficult for Christianity in its pioneer days, to face a religion which for six hundred years had been the dominant cult of the Persian and Parthian Empires. A spiritual opposition, however, more serious than persecution devolved upon the early evangelists of Christianity because many outward features and beliefs of Zoroastrianism appeared identical to those of the apostolic church. This anti-Christian religion began to tell of Mithra the mediator, of his terrestrial mission to defend the faithful, of his ascension to heaven, of the baptism he instituted, of his second coming followed by the restoration of all things and the final unending reign of the righteous. Resemblances between Christianity and Zoroastrianism were so great that when the early Christians had multiplied enough to face their opponent, each body was in a position to look upon the other as a counterfeit.

The Sun-Worshipping Creed of Zoroaster

In tying the seasonable observances of its cult to the planets and the stars, Zoroastrianism had opened a field more sure for flights of speculation than the legends of older mythologies. The worst obstacle, however, which the early church had to meet was the exalted character given to Sunday by the Persian devotees. The great defect in many of the ancient religions was that they neglected to assemble their followers one day in seven to hear expounded the laws of their founders. This Moses had commanded his people to do.³⁶ Zoroastrianism did not neglect this principle. It emphasized the sacredness of one day in seven. Since it was pre-eminently a religion of sun worship, what was more appropriate than to choose Sunday, the day of the sun, as the holy day?³⁷

To enhance Sunday observance, the magi, or Persian wise men, taught that the five planets, all that were known in their day, with the sun and the moon, were deities. A day of the week was dedicated to each one of these seven heavenly bodies. Thus Sunday was devoted to Mithra, or the sun, the greatest of all gods of Zoroastrianism.

Their baptismal service, called the "taurobolium," was an example of the Mithraistic rites so abhorrent to the followers of Jesus. The novitiate was made to lie naked on the floor of a lower

chamber whose roof was latticework. In the upper chamber a bull was slain, and the blood dripped through the latticework onto the candidate below. We have already mentioned the practice of incest. Since Mithra was said to have been born in this way, the revolting practice persisted through the centuries. In addition to the Persian sacrifices, oblations were used, such as pouring oil or honey or milk onto the ground. As the followers advanced through the seven stages or degrees upward in the cult of Mithraism, many purifications and flagellations were demanded.

We have noted the unparalleled rapidity and strength with which Mithraism captured the provinces of the Roman Empire. It was in the homeland of Persia, the center and source of the counterfeit, where the first missionaries of the Christian faith stormed its citadel. Thus, in the opposition of the western ecclesiastical power in Europe and in the powerful antagonist of Zoroastrianism in the East there was an almost insurmountable obstacle to be overcome by the Church of the East. It was providential that at this critical time while the church was extending its vast program toward the East, it unified its forces and found in Papas a strong leader.

The Church Meets Buddha's Counterfeit

In the centuries before Christ and immediately thereafter, the civilized nations became acquainted with one another through navigation, treaties, commerce, and travel.³⁸ Rome, Greece, Persia, and China were all interested in building and maintaining good roads, and determined to reach out for the other's territory. By the time of Pompey, about 50 B.C., the Roman rule had been extended to the western shores of the Caspian Sea, where the boundary of China was to be found.³⁹ From the time of Alexander's conquest of northern India (325 B.C.) there was considerable intercourse between Egypt and India.⁴⁰ The carrying into captivity of the Jews - that of the two tribes of the south, beginning 606 B.C., and that of the ten tribes of the north, beginning about 800 B.C. - and their being scattered throughout all nations, were other means of intercommunication between Oriental nations in Old Testament times. The Jesuit scholar, M. L. Huc, has pointed out that the Jews proceeded in numerous caravans to Persia, India, Tibet, and even China; that this had the effect of disseminating their books, their doctrines, and their prophecies among all the inhabitants of Asia; that the Jews were scattered into all cities; and that it was not easy to find a spot of the earth which had not received them and where they had not settled.⁴¹

This intercourse of Oriental nations is expressed by another writer:

Throughout the Han Dynasty commercial relations existed between Rome and China, the two greatest and most powerful empires of antiquity. In the first century, Strabo saw 120 ships in a Red Sea port, ready to sail to India; and, up to the opening of the third century, maritime expeditions left Egyptian and Persian ports via the Red Sea and Indian Ocean for Canton and other south China ports.⁴²

Khotan, a great city of Turkestan, far west from China proper, was founded by the Chinese emperor who built China's Great Wall (c. 214 B.C.). It was the capital of Turkestan, a country as large as France and very rich in resources. It was the central city where Chinese and Aryans met. Turkestan had highways, inns, and transportation facilities that made trade and communication possible between China and Persia and India.

The following significant link in history is most interesting. Historians point out that Darius the Great, son of Hystaspes, conquered northwestern India about the time that Buddha made his famous visit to King Ajatasatru, whose dynasty reigned over wide dominions in northeastern India.⁴³ Here was

a way for Zoroaster's teachings to mingle with those of Buddha. The part of India conquered by Persia was ruled as the twentieth satrapy, or province, and was considered the richest district in the Persian Empire. It furnished the largest bullion revenue of the empire's Asiatic provinces. A contingent of India's archers fought in the Persian army which marched against Greece.⁴⁴ This overlapping of Persia and India made Zoroastrian-ism available for the Hindu people.

The given name of Buddha was Gautama. The word Buddha means "the enlightened." Ernest de Bunsen says, "The doctrines of Zoroaster were as well known by Gautama as by the initiated Hindus, though they hid this knowledge more or less from the people."⁴⁵ Bunsen further says, "The Buddhistic reform was based on Zoroastrian doctrines."⁴⁶ Pythagoras of Greece followed Zoroaster. Since Confucianism in China in its close resemblance to Buddhism apparently followed Old Testament teachings and was similar to Pythagorean philosophy, agreements in these three religions can be founded.⁴⁷ Their differences are chiefly in the difference of emphasis. Buddha of India placed his emphasis on the world to come; Confucius of China on a religion of home and state; and Pythagoras of Greece on the mind and soul. The first was pantheistic, the second was nationalistic, and the third was spiritistic. In this manner these religious leaders influenced nations and caught them in their bewitching, false applications of divine revelations.

Until the time of Buddha, about 400 B.C., India had been in the grip of Brahmanism, loaded with the caste system and given over to idolatry. The new religion of Buddha swept successfully into this subcontinent. Buddhism changed idolatry from the worship of millions of gods to the worship of Buddha himself.⁴⁸ Its teaching is permeated with doctrines and ceremonies counterfeiting the revealed religion of the Old Testament. In Buddhism one can find visions, miracles, a priesthood, a carnal ten commandments, processions, temples, images, and feast days.⁴⁹ The great Buddha festival of the fifteenth day of the seventh month should be noted as being the precise day of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles.⁵⁰ In this, Buddha probably followed Zoroaster.⁵¹ Later striking evidences will be given of how Buddhism subsequently saved itself from world rejection by counterfeiting the history and doctrines of Christ.⁵²

The relation of Buddha to the seventh-day Sabbath is expressed by Arthur Lloyd in these words:

To us it will seem easy to conjecture the quarter from which he got his idea of a weekly Sabbath, and the fact that the Order of Monks kept their Sabbath days for many centuries after the nirvana will make it easier for us to recognize and admit the doctrine held by a large section of northern Buddhists that Buddha also taught, personally and during his earthly life, the salvation worked out for many by another Buddha, who is boundless in life, light, and compassion, and whom Japan knows as Amitabha.⁵³

The Church of the East Combats Hinduism

Hinduism, which had already attempted to meet the challenge of the Old Testament teachings and the Buddhist reform, bestirred itself again to oppose the Church of the East. In the days of the prophet Daniel the full light of God's truth broke upon the people of the Ganges. They were engaged in the sensual worship of their idols. Immorality and degeneracy had seized upon them with terrible force. They were destined to perish in their own corruption should salvation not reach them from some other quarter. The Jews of the ten tribes, more than a century before Daniel, had been taken into captivity. In the providence of God they had been scattered into many lands; yet they were still God's chosen people. Fired by the wonderful new revelations vouchsafed to the prophet Daniel, they

preached with a ringing challenge to the animistic gods of India. Hebrew literature poured across the Himalayas telling of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and a third Person of whom the Psalmist declared: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand."(Psalm 110:1.) The Jews settled in India.⁵⁴ One Orientalist finds convincing evidence that the Afghans were descended from the lost tribes. In the country of the Afghans among the innumerable descendants of the Jewish captives Buddha's race ruled. There stirring events of Buddha's ministry took place.⁵⁵

The Brahmans hastened to develop a new philosophy of the deity. Historians show that at this time (c. 500 B.C.) the Hindu priests changed their teachings and adopted the adorable conception of a loving heavenly Father.⁵⁶ A new literature sprang up, and innumerable tractates were written to place Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Siva (the destroyer), the Hindu trinity, on a par with Jehovah. These more abstract and less materialistic concepts of religion were the beliefs of the Brahmans and the educated classes, but they left the masses to their coarse idolatry. The Brahmans aimed to control the idolatry of the ignorant populace by using powerful doctrines of fear and favor.

Nothing had aroused the Jews in captivity to such a pitch of enthusiasm as the visions of Daniel disclosing the coming of their Messiah. The Hebrew prophet made it clear that this Anointed One was to be a suffering mediator, a substitute in His death for sinners.(Daniel 9:24; 7:27.) While the Brahmans did not grasp this phase of the Messiah's mission any more than did the Pharisees, they were aroused to the significant appeal which a divine mediator would have upon the masses. Therefore, they invented new teachings without acknowledging the source of their inspiration. They began to teach a Hindu trinity, a rival to the Old Testament Godhead. An illustration of this can be seen outside of Bombay, in the rock-cave temple on the island of Elephanta, visited annually by thousands of pilgrims and travelers. ⁵⁷

Besides giving to their votaries the three-heads-on-one-body type of trinity, the priests employed the heathen doctrines of pantheism, nirvana, and transmigration. In pantheism they taught that the Godhead was the sum total of the universe. Material things, as one saw them, did not exist. Every visible object was an illusion, all things were but fleeting manifestations of divinity. They were without essential reality. Only one thing was real - Brahma, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Indescribable, the All.

The doctrine of transmigration struck terror to the hearts of the people of India. It contemplated a never-ending succession of funerals and subsequent rebirths into lower animal or plant forms of life. Existence in this present life for the Hindu masses meant at the best only one misery after another. Death, however, held no release for them. Instead of bringing relief to life's sufferings, the soul must descend to earth again to become a snake, a dog, or a filthy swine. If any hope existed in a chance to choose the lesser of two evils in the world to come, they must obey the priests in this life. Hence, the power of the Brahmans.

The third doctrine, nirvana, was the belief in the utter absorption of existence at death. It meant the annihilation of the man, the self, by complete union with Brahma. It contemplated the melting away of all conscious entities into the passionless peace and rippleless thought of deity. The most blessed existence was the utter dissolution of all existence. The trinity would gather up into itself for endless years all the untold personalities of the universe. Heaven was not a place, it was a state of mind. It was heresy to the Hindu to say that eternity would be filled with holy, happy beings such as the Old Testament described. According to Hinduism, thrones, principalities, angels, demons, and mediators would all perish. They were all fantasies of the spirit; they did not really exist.

The New Revolution in Hinduism

Such was India five hundred years after Darnel when the Church of the East entered that unhappy land. Of all the difficult situations Christianity ever faced in the Orient, the one in India was without rival. Fearless in the strength of the Holy Spirit, apostolic fervor at once challenged hidebound heathenism. Now unified under the organization completed by Papas, the church went forth to conquer for Christ. God gave wonderful success. With the sickle of truth the witnesses for Jesus gleaned golden grain for the heavenly garner. Year after year, decade after decade, Christianity revealed itself as a conquering force in India.

Then an amazing revolution occurred. The Brahmans awoke with a start. They realized that new truths were wrenching their power from them. They doubtless reasoned thus, "Why sit we here as fools? Have we not seen the church at Rome in the west build up a successful rival to the New Testament church? Let us outrun both Rome and the simpler bodies of Christianity. Let us fabricate such a dazzling scheme of imitation that all other religions, even our own former teaching, will be completely eclipsed." Then about 600 they invented the Krishna legend, and in support of it they falsified their chronology.

The power of the gospel to challenge error is revealed in the stirring among the Hindu leaders. The pagan priests were aware that it meant the end of their power unless they fabricated new weapons. Success depended upon their ability to imitate. They must make the same powerful appeals to the human emotions which for the first time had been brought to the world through Jesus Christ. They must revamp their religious duties and copy or counterfeit the services of the true church.

To build a defense against the gospel, they were obliged to do three things. First, they must invent a god of their own who entered a human body. This could compete with the story of the birth of Jesus in the flesh, which was winning hearts everywhere. Secondly, they must give this counterfeit Messiah a name similar to Christ, with similar events of His life and parallel teachings. Thirdly, they must arrange their chronology with Hindu astronomy to throw the date of this fabricated incarnation centuries previous to the birth of Jesus in order to make Christianity appear to have been copied from Hinduism. New literature was provided to give success to the venture.

The deity they chose to incarnate was Krishna, a name much like that of Christ. Books written by pagans, previous to the coming of Christianity, had told of the descents of the gods among men. These, however, had been simply the manifestation of some part of some attribute of the divinity. The new doctrine of incarnation which now sprang up produced a complete round of literature and theology concerning the wondrous birth of Vishnu, the supreme deity, who came in human flesh under the name "Krishna." 58 "He descended in all the fullness of the godhead, so much so that Vishnu is sometimes confounded with Brahma, the latter becoming incarnate in Krishna as 'the very supreme Brahma.'" 59 Many epics were written to glorify the exploits of this god who had descended to share the joys and sorrows of humanity. In the hearts of millions, Krishna has come to occupy the place of Vishnu himself. Even as Christians direct their prayers to Christ instead of God, so Hindus may direct their prayers to Krishna rather than to Vishnu, the supreme deity.

Great credit is due to John Bentley who, in 1825, detected this fraud of the Brahmans after it had been accepted for twelve hundred years. The similarity between the names of Christ and Krishna had long been noticed. Writers had listed the many agreements between the events of Christ's birth and life and those of Krishna. 60 When later translations of Hindu literature were published, thinkers were puzzled

over the many startling similarities between the teachings of the two religions. The priests of India who claimed that the incarnation of Krishna was six hundred years before Christ, loved to boast that the New Testament was built out of the Hindu epics. Bentley solved the mystery. He obtained from the Brahmans the horoscope of Krishna, who, they said, was born at midnight of March 25, and also the positions of the sun, the moon, and the five planets among the heavenly constellations. This keen Englishman, skilled in the mathematics of astronomy, proved conclusively that the earliest date which could be claimed for the birth of Krishna was August 7, A.D. 600. 61 Subsequent writers on Hinduism have felt Bentley's findings worthy of consideration.

The following interesting details concerning Krishna are given by McClintock and Strong:

Krishnaism, with all its imperfections, may be accounted as a necessary and extreme revolt of the human heart against the unsatisfying vagaries of the godless philosophy into which Brahmanism and Buddhism had alike degenerated. The speculations of the six schools of philosophy, as enumerated by native writers, served only to bewilder the mind until the word *maya*, "illusion," was evolved as the exponent of all that belongs to the present life, while the awful mysteriousness of *nirvana* overshadowed the life to come. Man's nature asks for light upon the perplexed questions of mortal existence, but at the same time demands that which is of more moment, an anchorage for the soul in the near and tangible....

On the other hand, the Puranas disclose with regard to Krishna a human life, when considered from the most favorable standpoint, discreditable to the name and nature of man. It is a tissue of puerilities and licentiousness. The miraculous deeds of Krishna were rarely for an object commensurate with the idea of a divine interposition. His associations as a cowherd (*gopala*) with the *gopis* [females] - in which capacity he is most popular as an object of adoration - are no better than the amours of classic mythology. 62

At the time the Brahmans invented the Krishna story there was no opposing power in India strong enough to prevent them from creating the fraud. The Dark Ages were settling down on Europe. In the west there was neither enough interest nor ability to unmask the deception. It is a great tribute to the splendid missionary activity displayed by the Church of the East that Hinduism, fearful of losing its power, was driven to create a counterfeit of Christ and His gospel. It proves that the evangelical church over which Papas had been elected in 285 had become a force to be reckoned with by 600.

Speaking of Cosmas, the celebrated Nestorian traveler and preacher, a well-known Oriental writer, using the word "monk" in its original meaning of pastor, indicates the vast extent of the Church of the East in 538:

Here we will again pause a moment to consider the description given by Cosmas (who before he became a monk was an Alexandrian merchant and navigated the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and also visited India and Ceylon) of the vast extent of AN ORIENTAL CHRISTIANITY at the very date, A.D. 535, of the arrival of the Mahayana in Japan. He declares that churches with a complete liturgy were then to be found in Ceylon, Malabar, Socotra, and N. W. India (apparently identical with the St. Thomas Christians) ministered to by bishops and priests sent from the Patriarch of Seleucia; also in Bactria and amongst the Huns; in Mesopotamia, Scythia, etc. 63

In the story of Papas we have seen the forces with which the Church of the East contended. Yet against all these powerful enemies the church under the organization begun in the days of Papas was triumphant. Each one of these counterfeit religions was obliged to adopt drastic measures to combat

the inroads made by this church, a guardian of apostolic Christianity. God greatly blessed the Church of the East and preserved it for centuries until it had accomplished its mission.