

Claudius, Bishop of Turin

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Claudius of Turin was an 8th Century Bishop who fought against the growing errors of the medieval church.

Claudius spent three years as court chaplain to Louis (778-840) king of Aquitaine. Louis commissioned Claudius to write commentaries on nearly all the books of the Bible for the education of the clergy. Most of these commentaries were based on earlier works by Augustine, Jerome and other Latin Fathers. When Louis became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 813 he appointed Claudius to the see of Turin in 817. Under the favourable circumstances resulting from the Council of Frankfurt in 794 (which amongst other things condemned the decree of the Second Council of Nicaea (787) on the worship of icons) Claudius set about to reform the church.

Claudius, commencing his role as Bishop of Turin, spoke out against a number of excesses in the Church. He made a series of attacks on image worship, relics, pilgrimages, intercession of the saints, the adoration of the cross and every visible symbol of Christ's life. He found the Italian churches full of idolatry and sought to reverse this trend:

'I found all the churches filled with sordid images, which are anathematized and contrary to true teaching. Since everyone was honouring them, I undertook their destruction single-handedly.'

He denounced the worship of images and specifically the adoration of the cross saying: *'Because Christ suffered on it we might also worship every virgin because he was born of a virgin, every manger because he was laid in a manger, every ship because he taught from a ship, yea, every ass because he rode on an ass into Jerusalem.'*

He also spoke against the intercession of the saints, *'whoever seeks from any creature in heaven or on earth the salvation which he should seek from God alone, is an idolater. The departed saints themselves do not wish to be worshipped by us and cannot help us. While we live we may aid each other by prayers, but not after death.'*

Claudius also taught publicly that the apostolic office of St Peter ceased with his life, that the "power of the keys" passed to the whole Episcopal order and he therefore opposed the pilgrimages to Rome that sought intercession from the Apostle Peter. He said *'there is no greater scandal that to prohibit a man from taking that path by which he is able to travel to eternal joys.'*

He had little regard for the Roman see and courted much scorn and criticism. He was censured by Pope Paschalis I, and opposed by his old friend the Abbot Theodemir of Nismes to whom he had dedicated his lost commentary of Leviticus (823). He was also opposed by Dungal (of Scotland or Ireland, about 827), and by Bishop Jonas of Orleans (840), who unjustly charged him with the Adoptionist and even the Arian heresy. The all-powerful influence of the popes, the sensuous tendency of the age, the ignorance of the clergy, and the general lack of knowledge amongst the people combined to result in the ultimate victory of image worship in Italy and even France.

All references from: Early Medieval Theology, George McCracken & Allen Cabaniss (Philadelphia, 1957).