

SOUL WINNING BAPTISTS BEFORE THE REFORMATION

There were three major Baptist groups during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries and great men of God led all three. Henry of Clugny was the leader of the Henricians in France. The Petrobrussians were followers of Peter de Bruys in Northern Italy. The Arnoldists were followers of Arnold of Brescia. These men lived during the time of the Catholic crusades. As the Catholic church was embarrassed by the butchery and failure of the crusades, they needed to focus their unused barbarism on the locals of Europe. We will meet 2 of them in this article.

To meet our first Baptist hero we need a little background on Clugny. The Paulicians from the east who had settled in southern France and became the Albigeneses had a profound effect on the Catholic institution. As the Albigenses went soul winning, planted churches and lived holy lives it allowed people to easily see the corruption of the Catholic leadership. They were the reason for the birth of the Clugny order. The Clugny order was founded to train men for a sincere ministry. The first supervisor of the order of Clugny (or Cluny) was Odo, and it is evident from his writings that he rejected special powers of the Eucharist and did not receive Extreme Unction at his death.

Clugny was in northern France in the diocese of Rheims, which in 991 received Gerbertus to be archbishop. It was found that the Holy Mother institution had serious problems with the diocese (district) of Clugny in northern France. It was evident that Rheims, Clugny and the Alpine region were influenced by the testimony of the Paulicians or the Albigenses, as well as the Vaudois.

Henry was a monk of Clugny and he preached against the sins of the clergy. Monks lived a hermit lifestyle, which started among pagan religions, began among Christians in the third century in the midst of the rampant worldliness in the churches. The first official monk was St. Anthony, whose followers drew up the first orders for a "monk." Anthony built the first "abbey" in the fifth century followed by Benedict in the sixth.

Clugny was a city that was known for its purity of doctrine and practice so it is no a surprise that Henry should come forth from that place. In 1116, Henry entered the city of Mans on the first day of Lent. He preached for weeks *against* the worship of saints, infant baptism, works salvation and the corruption of the clergy. Revival broke out. He preached with the same results in different towns across Europe. He was imprisoned in Clugny but escaped. He was arrested at Rheims and imprisoned for life.

William Cathcart wrote of him:

Henry, a monk in the first half of the twelfth century, became a great preacher. He was endowed with extraordinary powers of persuasion, and with a glowing earnestness that swept away the greatest obstacles that mere human power could banish. He had the grace of God in his heart. He denounced prayers for the dead, the invocation of saints, the vices of the clergy, the superstitions of the church and the licentiousness of the age, and he set an example of the sternest morality. He was a master-spirit in talents, and a heaven-aided hero, a John Knox, born in another clime, but nourished upon the same all-powerful grace.

When he visited the city of Mans the inferior clergy became his followers, and the people gave him and his doctrine their hearts, and they refused to attend the consecrated mummeries of the popish churches, and mocked the higher clergy who clung to them. In fact, their lives of the catholic priests were endangered by the triumph of Henry's doctrines. The rich and the poor gave him their confidence and their money, and when Hildebert, their bishop, returned, after an absence covering the entire period of Henry's visit, he was received with contempt and his blessing with ridicule. Henry's great arsenal was the Bible, and all opposition melted away before it.

He retired from Mans and went to Provence in South Eastern France, and the same remarkable results attended his ministry; persons of all ranks received his blessed doctrines and forsook the foolish superstitions of Rome and the churches in which they occupied the most important positions. At and around Thoulouse his labors seem to have created the greatest indignation and alarm among the few faithful friends of Romanism, and Catholics in the most distant parts of France heard of his overwhelming influence and his triumphant heresy with great fear. In every direction for many miles around he preached Christ, and at last Pope Eugene III, sent a cardinal to overthrow the heretic and his errors. He wisely took with him, in 1147, the celebrated St. Bernard. He was a more eloquent man, and he was probably the most noted and popular ecclesiastic in Europe. He [St. Bernard] speaks significantly for the state of things which he

found in Henry's field: "The churches (Catholic) are without people, the people without priests, the priests without due reverence, and, in short, Christians are without Christ; the churches were regarded as synagogues, the sanctuary of God was not held to be sacred, and the sacraments were not reckoned to be holy, festive days lost their solemnity, men died in their sins, souls were snatched away everywhere to the dread tribunal. Alas! Neither reconciled by repentance nor fortified by the communion. The life of Christ was closed to the little children of Christians, whilst the grace of baptism was refused, nor were they permitted to approach salvation, although the Saviour lovingly proclaims before them, and says, "*Suffer the little children to come to me.*"

Elsewhere, St. Bernard, speaking of Henry and other heretics, says, "They mock us because we baptize infants, because we pray for the dead and because we seek the aid of *glorified* saints."

That Henry had a great multitude of adherents is beyond a doubt, and that he was a Bible Christian is absolutely certain, and that he and his followers rejected infant baptism is the testimony of St. Bernard and of all other writers who have taken notice of the Henricians and their founders. We include to the opinion of Neander that Henry was not a Petrobrusian. **We are satisfied that he and his disciples were independent witnesses for Jesus raised up by Baptists.** Henry of Clugny perished in prison.

Our second Baptist hero is Peter de Bruys, founder of the Petrobrussians.

John Horsch wrote:

The sect of the **Petrobrussians, followers of Peter de Bruys**, born 1093, spread widely in southern France. In doctrine and practice there was close agreement between them and the Waldsenses. Peter de Bruys was an eloquent evangelist, preaching against the foremost doctrines of Romanism. In 1145 he was burned at the stake as a heretic in St. Gilles. Like the Waldenses, **the Petrobrussians rejected infant baptism, the oath, prayers to the saints, prayers for the dead, adoration of images and veneration of relics.** They agreed with the Waldenses and earlier evangelical parties in giving a strong testimony against all forms of worldliness.

William Cathcart wrote:

Peter de Bruys was the Catholic priest of an obscure parish in France, which he left, early in the twelfth century, when he became a preacher of the Gospel. He taught that baptism was of no advantage to infants, and that only believers should receive it, and he gave a new baptism to all his converts; he condemned the use of churches and altars, no doubt for the idolatry practiced in them; he denied that the body and blood of Christ are to be found in the bread and wine of the Supper, and he taught that the elements on the Lord's table are but signs of Christ's flesh and blood; he asserted that the offerings, prayers and good works of the living could not profit the dead, that their state was fixed for eternity the moment they left the earth. Like the English Baptists of the seventeenth century, and like the Quakers of our day, he believed that it was wrong to sing the praises of God in worship; and he rejected the adoration of crosses, and destroyed them wherever he found them.

It is said that on a Good Friday the Petrobrusians once gathered a great multitude of their brethren, who brought with them all the crosses they could find, and that they made a large fire of them, on which they cooked meat, and gave it to the vast assemblage. This is told as an illustration of their blasphemous profanity. Their crucifixes, and along with them probably the images of the saints, were the idols they had been taught to worship, and when their eyes were opened they destroyed them, just as the converted heathen will now destroy their false gods. Hezekiah did a good thing in destroying the serpent of brass, which in the wilderness had miraculous powers of healing, when the Israelites began to worship it as a god.

Peter's preaching was with great power; his words and his influence swept over great masses of men, bending their hearts and intellects before their resistless might. "In Provence," says Du Pin, "there was nothing else to be seen but Christians rebaptized, churches profaned or destroyed, altars pulled down, and crosses burned. The laws of the church were publicly violated, the priests beaten, abused, and forced to marry, and all the most sacred ceremonies of the church abolished."

Peter de Bruys commenced his ministry about 1125, and such was his success that in a few years in the places about the mouth of the Rhone, in the plain country about Thoulouse, and particularly in that city itself, and in many parts of "the province of Gascoigne" he led great throngs of men and women to Jesus, and overthrew the entire authority of popes, bishops, and priests. Had the life of this illustrious man been spared, the Reformation probably would have occurred four hundred years earlier under Peter de Bruys instead of Martin Luther, and the Protestant nations of the earth would not only have had a deliverance from four centuries of priestly perversion and widespread soul destruction, but they would have entered upon a godly life with a **far more Scriptural creed** than grand old Luther, still in a considerable measure wedded to Romish sacramentalism, was fitted to give them .

Peter and his followers were decided Baptists, and like ourselves they gave a fresh baptism to all their converts. They reckoned that they were not believers when first immersed in the Catholic Church, and that as Scripture baptism required faith in its candidates, which they did not possess, **they regarded them as wholly unbaptized**; and for the same reason they repudiated the idea that they rebaptized them, confidently asserting that because of the lack of faith they had never been baptized. **Baptists do not re-baptize** because immersing or christening of unbelievers (infants cannot believe) *is* not baptism.

The enemies of the Petrobrussians accused them of:

1. Denying that little children under years of responsibility can be saved by the baptism of Christ; and that the faith of another could benefit those who were unable to exercise their own.
2. Saying that temples or churches should not be built.
3. Requiring holy crosses [crucifixes used for idol worship] to be broken and burned. They urged their destruction as a Christ-dishonoring idol.
4. Denying the reality of the body and blood of the Lord, as offered daily and constantly in the sacrament (Eucharist). [That is, they denied transubstantiation.]
5. Their enemies further accused them of demanding Scripture for everything and not just the sayings of the fathers.

As I read of these men, I am encouraged to speak out against sin because of their example and I am reminded how wonderful I have it when I go soulwinning. Henry of Clugny and Peter de Bruys were great pastor's who inspired soul winning in the face of deadly opposition. Our Baptist heritage has always sought to win men to Christ at all costs. Acts 5:29 *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."*