

that "the transgressors had come to the full"—and the degree to which the nominal church had departed from the standard of faith, morals, and worship contained in the Scriptures, well nigh surpasses belief. Then it was that those foul corruptions and superstitions were introduced into the church, which finally grew to such a pitch of enormity as to occasion the separation of Luther and the other reformers from what they deemed and denominated the communion of Antichrist. At this period it was, that the veneration for departed saints and martyrs—the idolatrous worship of images and relics—the rendering divine honours to the Virgin Mary—the doctrine of purgatory—and the adoration of the Cross, had become firmly established, and thus the lustre of the Gospel suffered a dark eclipse, and the essence of Christianity was lost under a load of idle and superstitious ceremonies.

In the eastern parts of the empire, especially Syria and the countries bordering upon Arabia, as well as in some parts of Arabia itself, these evils were aggravated by the numerous sects and heresies that prevailed, and by the incessant controversial wars which they waged with each other. The church was torn to pieces by the furious disputes of the Arians, Sabellians, Nestorians, Eutychians, and Collyridians, by whom the great doctrines of Christianity were so confounded with metaphysical subtleties and the jargon of schools, that they ceased, in great measure, to be regarded as a rule of life, or as pointing out the only way of salvation. The religion of the Gospel, the blessed source of peace, love, and unity among men, became, by the perverseness of sectaries, a firebrand of burning contention. Council after council was called—canon after canon was enacted—prelates were traversing the country in every direction in the prosecution of party purposes, resorting to every base art, to obtain the authoritative establishment of their own peculiar tenets, and the condemnation and suppression of those of their adversaries. The contests also for the episcopal office ran so high, particularly in the West, that the opposing parties repeatedly had recourse to violence, and, in one memorable instance, the interior of a Christian church was stained by the blood of a number of the adherentes of the rival bishops, who fell victims to their fierce contentions. Yet it is little to be wondered at that these places of preferment should have been so greedily sought after by men of corrupt minds, when we learn, that they opened the direct road to wealth, luxury, and priestly power. Ancient historians represent the bishops of that day, as enriched by the presents of the opulent, as riding abroad in pompous state in chariots and sedans, and surpassing, in the extravagance of their feasts, the sumptuousness of princes; while, at the same time, the most barbarous ignorance was fast overspreading the nations of Christendom, the ecclesiastical orders themselves not excepted. Among the bishops, the legitimate instructors and defenders of the church, numbers were to be found incapable of composing the poor discourses which their office required them to deliver to the people, or of subscribing the decrees which they passed in their councils. The little learning in vogue was chiefly confined to the monks. But they, instead of cultivating science, or diffusing any kind