

Characters of 4th Century Christianity

Church History

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August 22, 2021

CHURCH AGES

The Early Church AD33-590

AD33-100 The First Century Church

AD100-300 The Patristic Age (Early Fathers)

AD300-590 The Imperial Church

The Medieval Church AD590-1517

The Reformed Church AD1517-1800

The Modern Church 1800-present

THE CHURCH DOCTORS

AMBROSE, AD340-397

Ambrose was born in the northern city of Trier in modern day Germany along the Rhine River. His family were wealthy Roman Christians. His mother was intelligent and religious. His father (Aurelius Ambrosius) was the praetorian prefect of Gaul.

Aurelius died when Ambrose was 14.

Ambrose was well educated in rhetoric, as well as literature and law. He followed his father's footsteps into civil service and became the governor of Liguria in Northern Italy. He was a talented speaker so when the Bishop of Milan (an Arian) died, the people of Milan elected Ambrose, even though he had no formal education in Bible or theology. At first, he protested, but then agreed.

He gave his money to the poor and studied to meet the demands of his position. He was known as a kind man. Even though he opposed the Arians, his opponents noted how respectfully Ambrose treated them.

His kindness didn't detract from his boldness. Theodosius I was emperor at the time. On one hand, Theodosius trusted Christ, but his anger often got the better of him. He was known to be especially vengeful toward his enemies. He was in Milan on one occasion and wanted to go to church, but Ambrose put him under church discipline. The legend goes that Theodosius humbled himself to Ambrose. By the time Theodosius died in AD395, Ambrose praised the emperor for his stance against paganism.

Another occasion for his boldness was standing against Arian churches. Emperor Valentinian (of the Eastern Provinces) and his mother became Arians along with many important people in the government and military. They wanted two catholic churches in Milan to be given to Arians. Ambrose resisted saying, "What belongs to God, is outside the emperor's power."

Ambrose was known as a good pastor and a great preacher though he employed an allegorical hermeneutic.

JEROME, AD342-420

As well loved and respected as Ambrose was, Jerome was not. He was known as a sullen person whom very few liked. That was all right because he didn't like very many people either. He was grumpy and people considered him annoying.

He tried on several occasions to begin popular movements, such as a monastic tradition, but he could never keep anyone long enough to establish his monastery as it were.

However, he was very intelligent, very passionate, and very concerned for holiness. He wrote more than any other church father except Augustine. He had many lively and sometimes bitter debates with Ambrose. Unlike Augustine who was a prodigal son who struggled to come to Christ because of his sin and lustful passions, Jerome tried sin once as a very young boy and hated so devoted to ridding himself of it. Whereas Augustine struggled with desire for women even after coming to Christ, Jerome struggled with a desire for secular books.

He is most well-known for translating the Latin Vulgate. Damascus I, Bishop of Rome, commissioned Jerome to translate the Latin edition in AD382. While he didn't consider the Apocrypha inspired and wished not to include to, he was compelled to add it to his edition. The Latin Vulgate would become the official Bible for theological debate.

AUGUSTINE, AD354-430

THE GREEK FATHERS

The 4th Century began to see a split between the Western (Latin) Church and the Eastern (Greek) Church. Eventually, this would result in the Great Schism (AD1054).

ALEXANDER OF ALEXANDRIA, AD?-326/328

ATHANASIUS, AD296-373

GREGORY NAZIANZUS, AD329-390

Gregory's story is like so many other theologians of his day, though he is often referred to as Gregory the Theologian. He was from a wealthy Christian family, well educated and feeling a real tension between public ministry and ascetic Christianity.

His mother, Nonna won Gregory's father to Christ. He in turn became a bishop. His father pressured him to become a priest, a pressure which Gregory described as "tyranny." Gregory's resistance of public was in that he always looked for a way to be insignificant. However, he did enter ministry having studied in Athens, Alexandria, and Caesarea.

He became an elder in Nazianzus (his hometown). He was elected Bishop of Sasima. He had become a popular opponent of Arianism and was asked by the Emperor to lead the charge against it at Constantinople in order to unify the church. However, when the Council of Constantinople was held in 381, some Arians rejected Gregory's authority to lead it. He bowed out with a final farewell address. The Council went on to clarify the Nicene position and finally condemn Arianism.

From Constantinople, Gregory retired to Nazianzus. He lived the remaining six years of his life at a fountain that was his last worldly possession, having given the rest of it to the poor. He wrote poetry (some 18,000 verses) and his autobiography. His friends would visit him in these years.

His greatest contribution was concerning the Trinity, specifically, the Holy Spirit.

Gregory on the Holy Spirit

Look at these facts: Christ is born, the Holy Spirit is His Forerunner. Christ is baptized, the Spirit bears witness to this ... Christ works miracles, the Spirit accompanies them. Christ ascends, the Spirit takes His place. What great things are there in the idea of God which are not in His power? What titles appertaining to God do not apply also to Him, except for Unbegotten and Begotten? I tremble when I think of such an abundance of titles, and how many Names they blaspheme, those who revolt against the Spirit!

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, AD347-407

John was born simply John, but given the name “Chrysostom” (golden mouth) because of his ability to preach. He is considered perhaps the greatest preacher of the Ancient Church. His sermons were based on a literal hermeneutic and very practical. John Calvin greatly respected him.

He was born in the city of Antioch. His mother secured an education for him. He became first a reader and then a deacon (381) of the church in Antioch. He was known for his ascetic lifestyle, filling his time with Bible study and committing the Bible to memory.

Eventually, John was elected as the Patriarch of Constantinople. (Constantinople is to Eastern Christianity what Rome is to the west.) John didn’t know about the election and refused to take the position at first. Then he was arrested and taken to Constantinople in chains against his will. Upon arriving he agreed to become the Bishop admitting that it must be the will of God.

He offended many political and ecclesiastical figures due to his refusal to host lavish banquets. Instead, he was committed to helping the poor. He didn’t like the fancy robes that were typical of Bishops in his day.

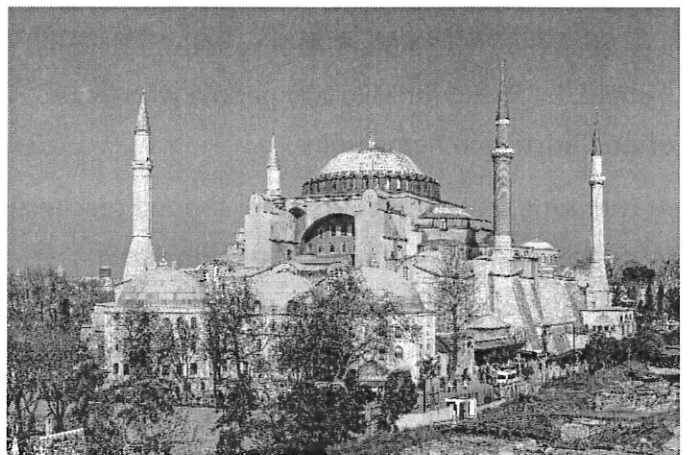
He spoke so ardently against the misuse of wealth that he offended Aelia Eudoxia, the wife of Emperor Arcadius. She thought that John had been speaking directly to her. About this same time, Theophilus of Alexandria came to Constantinople to bring charges against John. This resulted in the Synod of the Oak.

The official charges were that John was an Origenist. Actually, what happened was Theophilus had fallen out with four monks from

Africa. He accused them of holding to the teaching of Origen. These monks (known as “the Tall Brothers” because they were biological brothers and they were tall) fled to Constantinople where John welcomed them, seeing their condemnation as a political move. John was therefore accused of following Origen as well. Behind all of this was Theophilus’ desire that Alexandria gain more influence in the East and Aelia Eudoxia’s vengeance.

John was condemned, deposed as Bishop and banished. The verdict was almost immediately overturned by Emperor Arcadius because the people began to riot and threatened to burn down the Imperial Palace. In addition to this, an earthquake on the night of John’s arrest was seen as a sign of God’s anger by Arcadius’ wife so she requested his reinstatement as well.

Unfortunately, Eudoxia erected a statue of herself, giving John an occasion to decry the act as paganism. Eudoxia had John exiled again, this time to the mountains of Southern Georgia. The people of Constantinople rioted again and burned down the church that Constantine had built.



Hagia Sophia, built on the site of Constantine’s original church.

John appealed his exile to three bishops, Innocent I of Rome, Venerius of Milan, and Chromatius of Aquileia. These tried in vain to forestall his exile. John died of exposure on his way to Southern Georgia. His final words were, "Glory be to God for all things."

BRITAIN'S FIRST THEOLOGIAN

PELAGIUS, AD350?-420

Little is known of Pelagius' early life. He was from Britain, either Wales or Scotland. Jerome mistook him for Irish. He was called a Celt. He was a tall and portly man, whose figure his enemies called "grotesque." He was adamant about right living and so chose an ascetic lifestyle. Fluent to both speak and write Greek and Latin, he was also a persuasive speaker. Between his ascetic lifestyle, education and speaking ability, he became popular wherever he travelled. He is noteworthy as the first known theologian from Britain.

And he traveled extensively, coming first to Rome in the 380s and then throughout Africa and the Middle East. He was shocked in coming to Rome. He had expected the center of Christianity, as it was becoming, to be filled with serious Christians. Instead, he found morally lazy people who were often Christian in name only.

At that time, people would gather around teachers (especially ascetics) and listen to them teach. Pelagius himself became a popular teacher in like manner, focusing primarily on what it meant to be a morally responsible Christian. He had great influence over the elite women of Rome.

Pelagius came into some controversy with his ideas of Christian perfectionism. He believed that God has given us everything we need to be perfect

because Christ came as an example. He believed in the freedom of the human will to do whatever God has called them to do. He denied the concept of original sin in Adam citing Deuteronomy 24:16.

Deuteronomy 24:16

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin alone.

As Pelagius moved throughout the Empire, he was accused of heresy. Augustine was his chief opponent (citing Romans 5:12, among other texts), though he found criticism from Jerome and even the Emperor. He was brought up on charges and though he was acquitted, his theology was condemned. He ended his life in obscurity, probably in Jerusalem, alone and probably a bit bewildered as to why he was wrong.