

Gifts of Finest Wheat
Year 2, Session 2: Church History
Week 2: Significant Events in Church History 325 – 604 AD

I. Missionaries and Church Expansion

A. *St. Patrick, English Irishman, approximately 387-493*

- Born in Britain (St. Patrick was English!), in last days of Roman rule of the area, brought to Ireland as a slave, escaped¹
- Very good chance he traveled to Gaul, modern day France (Worse yet he went to school in France!), for theological and monastic instruction²
- Missionary work in Ireland, eventually a bishop, founded monasteries
Christians in Ireland before him, work needed to be done converting whole country after he was done, but he was decisive in making Ireland a Catholic nation
- Only two authentic documents written by Patrick exist
Autobiographical “Confession”, describes his conversion, call, and ministry
“Letter to the Soldiers of Corocticus”, reprimand of local prince whose soldiers had killed some Christian converts³

Week 2 Assignment Topic: There are three options to choose from for those who wish to do an assignment based on topics discussed in this week’s lesson plan. The required texts are available online, or in the books cited in the footnotes of this presentation. The different options are numbered 1, 2, and 3 in increasing order of difficulty. The assignment, for those pursuing the certificate for participating in the entirety of the Gifts of Finest Wheat program, is to read the assigned texts in their entirety and in your paper discuss them in a manner which shows that you are familiar with the essential concepts and doctrines contained in them.

1. *St. Patrick’s Confession*, <http://www.cin.org/patrick.html>, and his *Letter to Corocticus*, <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1166.htm>
 2. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html>
 3. *The Defense of Nicene Christology by St. Athanasius*, his work “*On The Incarnation*”, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2802.htm>
- B. *Clovis and Conversion of the Franks, 496*

¹ Joseph Duffy, *Patrick in His Own Words* (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas Publications, 2000), 37-39.

² Ibid, 43-44.

³ Ibid, 5.

- Franks, Germanic tribe, only tribe from area initially converted to orthodox Nicene faith, other tribes initially embraced Arianism⁴
Occurred under leadership of king named Clovis
- Northern tribes had been pagan, or Arian, threats to Christians living in Roman Empire
Conversion of Franks major step towards Northern and Western Europe becoming important parts of church
- Ancestors of most of us here had been threat to Christianity centered in Rome, Greece, North Africa, and what is now modern nation of Turkey

C. *St. Benedict (480-543) and Monasticism*

- Monasticism began on large scale in Egypt in the 4th century
Toleration of the church meant that those Christians who wished to be separate from society had to make deliberate efforts to seek that sort of life⁵
- St. Antony the Great (305-396), biography written by St. Athanasius, 1st great monastic saint⁶
338 AD, left solitude of desert to enter Alexandria, speak publicly in defense of Nicene faith in face of Arian crisis⁷
- St. Basil the Great (330-379), from Cappadocia in central Turkey, 1st to write detailed rule or guide for community life in monastic setting⁸
One of the three Cappadocian Fathers, along with St. Gregory of Nyssa (approximately 335-394) and St. Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389 or 390), great saints highly honored by Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholics, not very well known to most Roman Catholics
- Eastern style of monasticism became known in West through work and writings of St. Martin of Tours (approximately 316-397), St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and John Cassian (360-435)⁹
Also by 340 AD visit to Rome by two of St. Antony's monks who accompanied St. Athanasius during one of his exiles from Alexandria¹⁰
- St. Benedict began as solitary monk, attracted followers and community was formed¹¹
This same pattern was seen in the lives of many of the desert monks of Egypt
- Wrote his "Rule", instructions for prayer, work, community life, and theological study of monks¹²

⁴ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1993), 249.

⁵ Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro, *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 12-13.

⁶ Ibid, 14-15.

⁷ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: With an Introduction by C.S. Lewis* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 21.

⁸ Meisel and del Mastro, 16-17.

⁹ Ibid, 18-25.

¹⁰ St. Athanasius, 21-22.

¹¹ Meisel and del Mastro, 25-27.

Gradually adopted by existing Celtic monastic communities
Formed later English missionaries and scholars¹³

II. Continuing Doctrinal Controversies

A. *Arianism*

- St. Athanasius (298-373)
 - Born in Egypt, childhood time of brutal persecution of the church¹⁴
 - Served as Patriarch of Alexandria, opposition to Arianism meant he was exiled from Alexandria five times¹⁵
 - Able to preserve Nicene faith from its enemies
 - Arian threat present in Eastern half of the church
 - At times orthodox believers greatly outnumbered by those who rejected Nicaea
- Julian the Apostate, emperor 361-363
 - Baptized Christian, later renounced faith and embraced paganism
 - Possibly spurred by Constantine's son having Julian's brother executed¹⁶
 - His predecessor was Constantius II, Constantine's son
 - Constantius was opponent of Athanasius, exiled him from Alexandria
 - Julian tolerated all groups claiming to be Christian, hoped that in their disunity they would destroy each other¹⁷
 - Pagan emperor's tolerance, tolerance he hoped would destroy church, meant Athanasius able to return and once again serve as Patriarch of Alexandria
 - God writes straight with crooked lines
- Germanic tribes such as Burgundians, Suevi, and Visigoths were Arians until the 6th century, Catholic communities in Gaul, Spain, and North Africa suffered at their hands starting in the mid 5th century¹⁸

B. *1st Council of Constantinople, 381 AD*

- Reaffirmed, effectively finalized, renunciation of Arianism¹⁹
- Fully affirmed divinity of the Holy Spirit²⁰
- Condemned Apollinarius, whose teaching that Christ did not take on a human mind/soul effectively denied Christ's full humanity²¹

¹² Ibid, 29-32.

¹³ Ibid, 33-36.

¹⁴ St. Athanasius, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid, 22.

¹⁶ Chadwick, 154-155.

¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

¹⁸ Ibid, 249.

¹⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 238.

²⁰ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (Staten Island, NY: 2002), 228.

Christ's humanity and divinity both questioned by different groups of heretics

III. Saint Augustine of Hippo

A. *Life of St. Augustine, 354-430 AD*

- Along with St. Thomas Aquinas one of the two greatest theologians in church history
- Born in modern day Algeria, great intelligence from a young age
- Mother, St. Monica, was devout Christian
- Augustine as a young man
 - Scholar and teacher
 - Unmarried, had a son
 - Manichean
 - Gnostic religion, dual between spiritual forces of light and evil/dark material world
- Living and teaching in Milan, came to respect city's bishop, St. Ambrose (340-397), as speaker and teacher
 - Initially rejected Ambrose's Christian beliefs
 - Ambrose's and Monica's influence, combined with dramatic experience of voice in garden telling him to "Take up and read" (Read Romans 13:13-14)
- Became Bishop of Hippo, northern coast of Africa, great preacher, theologian, defender of the church
- Died 430 AD with Hippo surrounded by Vandals, north European barbarians with Arian leanings

B. *Teachings and Writings of St. Augustine*

- *Confessions*, autobiography
 - One of most important books ever written
 - 1st theological book, apart from scriptures, I ever read
 - (just mentioning this, not the reason it's so important)
- *City of God*, on church's relationship to society and politics
 - Written in response to disturbance caused by the Goths sacking Rome in 410 AD
- *On Christian Doctrine*
- *The Trinity*
- Scriptural commentaries

C. *St. Augustine and Doctrinal Controversy*

²¹ Kelly, 295-297.

- Donatism, claim that validity of the sacraments was dependent on the worthiness of the priest
 - In other words if priest wasn't holy enough then your baptism, marriage, confession, etc. didn't really count
 - Augustine, along with entire mainstream of church, affirmed that priest's moral and spiritual shortcomings were important matter, but did not limit grace given through sacraments celebrated by any validly ordained priest
- Pelagius, Irish monk who denied original sin and salvation by grace
 - Said we were not born with any natural tendency towards sin
 - Christ saved us not by paying a penalty, taking on our death, dying for our sins, but by being an example and role model
 - Being told we're naturally good and capable of saving ourselves has a certain appeal
 - But it means that our entry into Heaven isn't dependent on God's mercy, it's dependent on our success
 - So if you fall short, well, you should have tried harder, too bad and good luck
 - Struck at heart of Christian faith, our salvation is dependent on Jesus Christ, not on us
 - Augustine himself slipped into some heretical thought in response to this
 - Overreaction to Pelagianism led him in later years to almost complete denial of free will
 - Erroneous views on predestination
 - In this area no discernible difference between him and what John Calvin and Martin Luther would eventually teach at the time of the Protestant Reformation
 - Did perform tremendous service for church by doing with potential disastrous views of Pelagius
 - Significant errors in some areas don't do away with tremendous value of overwhelmingly vast majority of what he wrote

D. Other Important Aspects of St. Augustine's Teaching

- Speculated that each "day" of the Genesis creation story might have lasted 1,000 years
 - Over 1,400 years before Darwin shows us that Genesis can be seen as God's inspired word without having to be read in a strictly literal fashion
- Wrote systematically about a Catholic approach to issues of war and peace
 - Seen by most as father of what is known as just war theory
 - Oversimplification, some people speak as if Augustine invented the idea that Christians could legitimately participate in military service
 - In reality he built directly on thought of St. Ambrose

Also, others before Ambrose wrote on this topic, just not as extensively

IV. More Doctrinal Controversy

A. Council of Ephesus (western coast of modern day Turkey), 431 AD

Nestorius (386-451) vs. St. Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)

- Nestorians rejected *communication idiomatum*, communication of idioms
Anything that could be said of one of Christ's natures, human or divine, could be said about "the one Christological subject"
 - Could say that God suffered and died
 - That God was a small child
 - Could also say that the prophet from Galilee is God
 - This man from Nazareth is God's own son²²
- Rejection of this reality meant Mary could not be called Mother of God, in response to this council approved this portion of a letter written by St. Cyril of Alexandria:

It was not that an ordinary man was born first of the holy Virgin on whom afterwards the Word descended; what we say is that, being united with the flesh from the womb, (the Word) has undergone birth in the flesh... Thus (the Holy Fathers) unhesitatingly called the holy Virgin "Mother of God" (*theotokos*).²³

- Some had difficulty accepting decrees of council, in 433 St. Cyril agreed to statement which brought peace of mind to those who struggled with teachings of the Council of Ephesus, while maintaining full divinity and humanity of Jesus, statement said that Jesus Christ is:

Perfect God and perfect man composed of rational soul and body... consubstantial to the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial to us as to his humanity.²⁴

Remember from last week that consubstantial is translated as "one in being" in current English translations of the Nicene Creed

²² Kereszty, 239.

²³ Ibid, 240.

²⁴ Ibid, 240-241.

B. *Council of Chalcedon (located in area that now makes up part of the suburbs of Istanbul), 451 AD*

- Reaffirmation of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) in face of continuing resistance
- Reaction to teachings of a monk from Constantinople, Eutyches, who at least gave the public impression of denying that Christ had a human nature, he lacked theological precision in his language, some difficulty in sorting out his exact views²⁵
- Letter of Pope St. Leo the Great (400-461) affirmed by the Council, “Peter has spoke through Leo”, letter gives us understanding of Christ having two natures in one person, St. Leo wrote:

The character proper to each of the two natures, which came together in one person, being therefore preserved, lowliness was taken on by majesty, weakness by strength, and mortality by eternity. And, in order to pay the debt of our fallen state, the inviolable nature was united to another (nature) subject to suffering so that, as was fitting to heal our wounds, one and the same “mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human” (1 Tim 2:5), could die in one nature and not in the other. The true God, therefore, was born with the complete and perfect nature of a true human being; He is complete in His nature and complete in ours...²⁶

V. **Changes in Church and Society**

A. *Pope St. Leo the Great (400-461) as political and social leader*

- Encounter with Attila the Hun
 - Conqueror was laying waste to northern Italy
 - Leo headed delegation from Roman Senate
 - Attila was persuaded not to sack city²⁷
- When Vandals (remember them, they were attacking Hippo at time of Augustine’s death in 430) arrived from Africa in 455 they could not be kept from sacking city
 - Leo used influence to successfully persuade them to not kill and destroy as they sacked city²⁸
 - Strange definition of success, but result was much better than the alternatives

B. *Western Empire Collapses, 476*

- From time of Constantine on barbarians began to be incorporated into Empire

²⁵ Kelly, 330-334, 338-341.

²⁶ Kereszty, 241-242.

²⁷ Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* (San Francisco, HarperCollins: 1997), 77.

²⁸ Chadwick, 243.

In the East and West prominent Roman generals were from Barbarian tribes

Began to marry into prominent Roman families²⁹

- Fear of Huns pushed some Northern Europeans into Italy and Africa³⁰
- Conversion of many of these tribes to Arianism put them at odds with church and political leaders, east and west

Pushed orthodox Catholics to identify more strongly with the Roman Empire³¹

- 476 Empire ends with a whimper
Romulus Augustulus deposed by barbarian general Odoacer
At that point not seen as very significant event
Still powerful emperor in Constantinople
Even able to have Odoacer killed³²

Long term effects

Growing independence of Papacy

Increasing divisions between West and East, Eastern half of empire and church was more directly under control of emperors in Constantinople

C. *Pope St. Gregory the Great (540-604) as political and social leader*

- Breakdown in civil order meant Gregory had to move church towards taking on greater role in political and civil events, particularly when it came to caring for the poor³³
- In one letter Gregory calls himself the paymaster of imperial troops in Rome
Far from support of emperor in Constantinople they soldiers came to be – to some degree – under influence of local church leaders³⁴
- Negotiated peace with Lombards, Germanic tribes who had migrated to Northern Italy in large numbers³⁵
- Assumed great political, even military, power
Used it well, used it responsibly
Not all future popes who exercised same degree of power would do so in the same responsible manner

²⁹ Ibid, 247.

³⁰ Ibid, 247-248.

³¹ Ibid, 248-250.

³² Ibid, 250.

³³ McBrien, 96-97.

³⁴ John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: 450-680 AD* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 296-297.

³⁵ Ibid, 303-304.