

Early Church Fathers



Module Type

PATRISTICS

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Unit 1

1.1 *Introduction to Patristics*

Introduction to Patristics

PATRISTICS

What is Patristics?

Theology, being a study of God, encompasses many different types of studies. One of which is the study of the early Fathers, Patrology. ‘Patr’ in latin means Father. However, the study of the fathers does not limit itself to studying their life, their stories or their teachings. Rather, patrology enriches us with different kinds of theology, the ability to discern heresies and their impact on our faith as well as finding purpose and role of different individuals in the church. When we study the lives, biographies, and stories of the fathers, we are not studying as scholars, rather we become in touch with their lives. In fact, we are able to recognise their union with the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit within them and the early church. Most importantly, their writings reveal to us, God. Many different writings make us discover God in many different aspects. They help navigate our way through the church. There is no guide on how to apply the bible; they are our ultimate guide.

Examples of Fatherhood

The Patriarchs

Over the course of time, God has always bestowed on us the blessing of fathers leading His people. More than simply being their leader, from the outset, these fathers became a standard, beacons of light, that are examples to us, even today. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob are all referred to as Patriarchs. Marriam Webster defines Patriarchs as: “one of the scriptural fathers of the human race or of the Hebrew people”. Thus, patriarchs are fathers. God was clear in the type of blessing he bestowed through Abraham: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2) Looking at the fathers, their lives, their guidance is a significant blessing, bestowed and granted to us from God.

Criteria's of Fatherhood

There are two critical criteria for an individual, a saint, to be considered a church father. First, the individual must be orthodox. First and foremost, their doctrines and teachings are orthodox, that being straight and bringing glory to God. Much like an ortho-dontist straightens teeth, the ortho-dox fathers straighten the teachings in a manner that glorifies God.

Secondly, the orthodox father, much like the patriarchs, must maintain a holy life in such a way that we may attain the evangelical spirit of the early church. It must be maintained however, that the writings of the fathers are not infallible. Each separate quotation from the acts of any Father must be consolidated with writings of other fathers while being in harmony with scripture and consider the way each term is used within their contemporary time.

Referring to the fathers as a guide and preserving their orthodox teachings is of great importance. It is also inspirational to see early church fathers such as St. Athanasius and St. Cyril themselves quote their predecessors and fathers. St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us: "It is fit for us to preserve the tradition we have received from our forefathers without change." Similarly, St. Cyril proclaims that he himself loved the pursuit of the knowledge of his predecessors: "I am a lover of the true teachings, pursuing the spiritual steps of my Fathers."

Speech as the "Child" of the Soul

In the patristic tradition, a person's teaching is understood to arise from the depths of the heart. St. Clement of Alexandria expressed: '**The speech is the son of the soul**; therefore we call those who teach us our fathers.' Because teaching flows from this deepest center of the human person, the one who imparts spiritual wisdom assumes a role similar to that of a parent, begetting spiritual life in those who receive the teaching.

For this reason, St. Clement and many fathers from the earliest centuries referred to their instructors in the faith as "**Fathers.**" They are not merely academic authorities, but spiritual parents whose words shape the soul and form the heart in Christ.

The Tradition of Receiving and Handing On

A defining characteristic of the Holy Fathers is their awareness that authentic Christian teaching is **received**, not invented.

St. John Cassian expresses this succinctly:

“I shall say nothing on my own account, but only what I have received from the holy Fathers.”

Cassian speaks for the entire patristic ethos. A Father does not place himself as an originator of doctrine but as a faithful son of those who came before him. His task is to preserve, embody, and transmit the apostolic faith in its purity.

Thus, the patristic tradition forms a living chain of spiritual parenthood: each generation of Fathers begets the next through the words born from the depths of their souls.

The “Parenthesis Theory”

Modern Orthodox scholars sometimes describe this dynamic using the term **“Parenthesis Theory.”** The idea is that the Fathers speak *within* a received framework, the apostolic tradition, rather than outside or beyond it. Their teaching is enclosed, as it were, within parentheses formed by the faith handed down to them.

This means:

- They do not innovate new doctrines.
- They articulate the same faith in the language and circumstances of their time.
- Their authority rests not in originality, but in faithfulness.

In this way, the spiritual fatherhood of the Saints preserves the continuity of the Church’s life, ensuring that the teaching passed from father to son remains the same in every generation.

Classification of the Fathers

The classification of the fathers may be characterized in several fashions. Typically, the patristic writings will be reference based on one of the following:

Classification	Description
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Time	The Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers - the fathers in time with respect to the council of Nicea.
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Language	Based on the language of writing (Greek or Latin). The Majority of Eastern fathers would write in Greek while the western father in Latin.
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Location	Based on where they are from. From which we have the Alexandrian Fathers, The Cappodocian Fathers, The Antiochian and Syrian Fathers or the Latin/Western Fathers
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Material	Many authors wrote extensively addressing different topics and through different methods. Most material of writings would fall in one of the following categories: Apologetics, Exegetical Writings, Homilies, Letters, Liturgical Works, Dialogues, Poetry, Ascetic, Canons, Historical, Dogmatic.
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The Apostolic Fathers

Disciples of the Disciples

The Apostolic Fathers occupy a unique place in the life of the Church. They were the **disciples of the disciples**, those who learned directly from the Apostles themselves. In the spiritual vocabulary of the early Church, this relationship is often expressed in filial terms:

“When a man learns from the mouth of another, it is said that he is the son of the person who teaches him, and the latter is called father.” - St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies Book IV

Thus, the Apostolic Fathers stand as the first “sons” of the Apostles, receiving from them the living tradition of Christian faith and practice.

The Simplicity and Importance of Their Writings

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers are marked by simplicity, yet they hold profound significance. Many aspects of ecclesial life that are only briefly mentioned in Scripture are more clearly explained by these early witnesses.

For example, the New Testament speaks only in passing about **the laying on of hands** for episcopal ordination, without detailing its form. Yet in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we see how the earliest Christians understood and enacted such practices.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, for instance, calls the Eucharist “**the medicine of immortality**” and strongly affirms the unity of the Church around **one bishop in each city**, a principle foundational to Orthodox ecclesiology.

And after the Book of Acts, which recounts the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* is the earliest complete and reliable account of a Christian martyr’s final witness.

Through these writings, we glimpse the lived faith of the earliest post-apostolic communities.

The Fathers Direct Us Toward the Church

Following the Apostolic Fathers is itself the path recommended by the later Fathers. St. Irenaeus, a spiritual grandson of the Apostles through St. Polycarp, teaches:

“One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily found in the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles placed all that pertains to the truth.”
(*Against Heresies* III.4)

And again:

“Those who explain Scripture without the help of the Church’s tradition cut asunder the significance of the truth.”

For Irenaeus, fidelity to the Apostolic Fathers is fidelity to the Apostles themselves.

The Fathers on Tradition and Spiritual Fatherhood

The early Fathers consistently testify that Christian teaching is an inheritance, passed on from teacher to disciple in an unbroken chain.

St. Clement of Alexandria writes:

“Words are the progeny of the soul. Hence we call those who instructed us fathers.”

(Stromateis 1.1.2–2.1)

St. Gregory of Nyssa echoes the same truth:

“We have the Tradition set out for us from the Fathers like an inheritance, through apostolic succession and transmitted through the saints.”

And St. Basil the Great summarizes the entire patristic worldview:

“Among the dogmas and the kerygma preserved in the Church, some we possess through written teaching, and others we received from the Apostolic Tradition, handed down in secret. Both have the same authority and force.”

The Unified Witness

Across generations, the Fathers speak with one voice: **Christian truth is not self-invented but received.** The Apostolic Fathers are thus the first stewards of this inheritance, standing closest to the Apostles and faithfully handing down what they had themselves received.

Their witness forms the first link in the great chain of spiritual fatherhood that continues through the centuries and remains the living heart of Orthodox tradition.

Apologists (Ante-Nicene Fathers)

The Meaning of Apologia

The term *apologia* in Greek means “**a defense**”, specifically a reasoned explanation offered on behalf of the truth. From this comes the theological discipline of **apologetics**, the ordered defense of the Christian faith. For the early Church, such defense was offered not only through rational arguments

but also through the living witness of holiness. A life transfigured by grace is itself an irrefutable testimony to the truth of Christ.

The Great Apologists of the Early Church

Among the most prominent Orthodox apologists are Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and St. Clement of Alexandria. These Fathers wrote at a time when Christianity was misunderstood and often persecuted, and they sought both to correct false accusations and to reveal the inner beauty and coherence of the Christian faith.

St. Justin Martyr

St. Justin, a philosopher who found in Christ the fulfillment of all true wisdom, composed *The First Apology*, addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius. In it he defends the moral life of Christians and presents reasoned arguments showing the truth and nobility of the Gospel. He also gives one of the earliest explicit testimonies to the Church's understanding of the Eucharist:

“Not as common bread or as common drink do we receive these... We have been taught that the food that has been eucharistized by the word of prayer, that food which by assimilation nourishes our flesh and blood, is the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.”

Justin's witness unites philosophy with martyrdom, as he ultimately sealed his apology with his own blood.

Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus, writing *To Autolycus*, addresses a learned pagan friend in order to show the divine authority of the Christian faith and the irrationality of paganism. His arguments expose the inconsistencies of Greek philosophy when it departs from the revealed truth:

“But Plato and those of his school acknowledge indeed that God is uncreated, and the Father and Maker of all things; but then they maintain that matter as well as God is uncreated, and aver that it is coeval with God. But if God is uncreated and matter uncreated, God is no longer, according to the Platonists, the Creator of all things, nor, so far as their opinions hold, is the monarchy of God established. And further, as God, because He is uncreated, is also unalterable; so if matter, too, were uncreated, it also would be

unalterable, and equal to God; for that which is created is mutable and alterable, but that which is uncreated is immutable and unalterable”

Theophilus’s writings reveal the early Church’s insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God as Creator of all.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus stands as the great defender of the faith against Gnostic heresies, which denied both the unity of Scripture and the true humanity and divinity of Christ. His theological vision is pastoral, rooted in the love of God for humanity. In *Against Heresies*, he explains why humanity was removed from Paradise:

“Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God. (Against Heresies 3.23.6)”

For Irenaeus, God’s actions, even His judgments, are always expressions of divine compassion.

St. Clement of Alexandria

St. Clement sought to show that true philosophy finds its fulfillment in Christ and that Christian virtue surpasses all pagan moral systems. His writings address ethics, asceticism, marriage, knowledge of God, and the meaning of martyrdom. On the nature of divine reward, he writes:

“If God rewarded the righteous immediately, we would soon be engaged in business, not godliness. We would pursue not piety, but profit.”

Clement shows that virtue must be pursued for love of God, not for earthly advantage.

Tertullian

Tertullian is often read among the early apologists for the strength of his rhetoric and the clarity of his defense of Christian morality. Yet he is **not considered a saint**, because several of his later teachings departed from the mind of the Church. His works remain valuable historically, but the Orthodox tradition receives them with discernment.

Golden Age of The Fathers (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers)

In 313, the Edict of Milan, which was the agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire, ushered in a new era for Christians. Apologetical writings were less necessary. Christian writers could focus their works on promoting the Christianization of the world and explaining the Church's teachings. In the Eastern Greek world, talented Christians with a deep understanding of Greek culture contributed to Christian literature. In the Western Latin world, authors drew inspiration from many of the same sources of Greek learning, albeit in translation. The works of both Greek and Latin Christian writers encompassed various forms, including exegetical, doctrinal, polemical, moral, and ascetical. Many doctrinal and polemical works aimed to provide clarity and understanding of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Others sought to correct heretical interpretations of Christian truths or to clarify misrepresentations of Christian life and beliefs.

The Cappadocian Fathers, a trio of influential theologians from the 4th century, played a pivotal role in establishing Nicene orthodoxy, particularly in regard to Trinitarian theology. These three remarkable individuals—St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus—were instrumental in shaping the theological discourse of their time and leaving a lasting legacy on Christian thought. St. Basil the Great, the eldest of the Cappadocian Fathers, was a brilliant theologian and a charismatic leader. His contributions to Trinitarian theology were significant, and he is often credited with developing the concept of the Holy Spirit as the "co-equal and co-eternal" third person of the Trinity. St. Basil's writings, such as "On the Holy Spirit," provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of the Trinity and its implications for Christian faith and practice.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of St. Basil, was a profound philosopher and mystic. His theological insights delved into the depths of Trinitarian mystery, exploring the relationship between the three divine persons and the unity of the Godhead. St. Gregory's writings, such as "On the Trinity," emphasized the dynamic interplay within the Trinity and the idea of perichoresis, or "mutual indwelling," among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, often referred to as "the

Theologian," was a gifted orator and poet. His theological contributions focused on articulating the full divinity of Christ and the unity of the Trinity. St. Gregory's sermons, such as "The Five Theological Orations," eloquently defended the Nicene Creed and provided a strong case against Arianism, a heresy that denied the full divinity of Christ.

Together, the Cappadocian Fathers formed a formidable theological alliance that championed Nicene orthodoxy. Through their writings, teachings, and debates, they successfully defended the doctrine of the Trinity against various heretical challenges. Their influence extended beyond their time, shaping the theological landscape of the early church and continuing to impact Christian thought and spirituality to this day. The Cappadocian Fathers' profound insights into Trinitarian theology have left an indelible mark on Christian theology. Their emphasis on the unity and distinctness of the three divine persons, their exploration of the inner life of the Trinity, and their defense of Nicene orthodoxy have been instrumental in shaping Christian understanding of God's nature and the mystery of the Trinity.

St. Augustine, a prolific writer and influential theologian of the early Christian Church, left behind a vast body of work that covered a wide range of topics. Among his most notable writings are his interpretations of the Bible, often characterized by their allegorical and mystical approach. His *Confessions*, a spiritual autobiography, offer profound reflections on his personal journey toward faith and salvation. Additionally, St. Augustine composed numerous homilies, or sermons, which explored various passages of Scripture and provided practical guidance to his congregation. His doctrinal treatises, both philosophical and theological, addressed complex issues related to faith and reason. In his writings against philosophers, St. Augustine sought to defend Christian beliefs from the challenges posed by pagan philosophies, particularly those of the Neoplatonists. His work on the Trinity, titled *De Trinitate*, is considered a seminal text in Christian theology, offering a nuanced understanding of the nature of God as three distinct persons in one divine essence. His writings are known for their eloquence and their rigorous intellectual engagement with the issues of his time.

During this period, St. John Chrysostom, often referred to as the "golden-mouthed" orator, stood out among the many Greek Fathers. In Constantinople, he zealously worked to address clerical abuses, reform monastic life, and combat the vices of the wealthy. However, his efforts met strong resistance, leading to his banishment. Later, Emperor Theodosius II publicly sought God's forgiveness for St. John's mistreatment. He left a significant literary legacy, excelling as an exegete trained in the Antiochian method of clear exposition and practical application. His homilies on Genesis, the Psalms, and Isaiah are notable contributions, but his most outstanding work lies in his exegesis of the New

Testament, particularly the Epistles of St. Paul. Moreover, St. John's treatises, such as *De sacerdotio* on the priesthood and his defenses of monastic life found in *On the Enemies of Monasticism*, *On Compunction*, and *Exhortation to the Fallen Theodore*, had a profound impact. His writings inspired Theodore of Mopsuestia to return to monastic life.

Among the many Latin writers of the West, in the Golden Age of the Fathers, the ones who stand out most prominently are St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. Among the notable defenders of the Nicean teachings on the Trinity, Hilary of Poitiers stands alongside St. Athanasius. Hilary vigorously opposed Arianism, effectively silencing it in the Western regions. His work *De Trinitate*, originally titled *Defide contra Arianos* (On the Faith against the Arians), highlights his efforts. St. Ambrose of Milan, renowned as the bishop who converted Augustine, possessed extensive knowledge of the Greek Fathers' works. Similar to Hilary, he opposed Arianism, which found a staunch supporter in Empress Justina.

Another notable figure is Origen of Alexandria, a Christian scholar who contributed significantly to early Christian thought, but like Tertullian, is not a saint in the Orthodox church due to some heresies found in his writings. Some scholars defend Origen saying he did not write those heresies, as most of his writings were written by his students while he was narrating to them. Origen has extensive writings encompassing various genres, including commentaries on Scripture, theological treatises, homilies, and letters. One of Origen's most notable contributions is his extensive commentaries on biblical texts. His exegetical works, such as the "Commentary on John" and the "Commentary on Matthew," demonstrate his deep understanding of Scripture and his ability to synthesize different interpretive traditions. Origen's interpretations often delve into allegorical and symbolic interpretations, seeking to uncover hidden layers of meaning beyond the literal text.

In addition to his exegetical works, Origen wrote numerous theological treatises that explored profound theological concepts and doctrines. His treatise "On First Principles" is a systematic exposition of his theological system, addressing topics such as the nature of God, the creation of the world, and the relationship between the divine and the human. Origen's theological insights have influenced subsequent Christian thinkers, contributing to the development of Christian orthodoxy.

The Desert Fathers

The desert fathers, including St. John the Short, St. Arsenius, and St. Moses the Black, were renowned mentors of ascetic life during the early centuries of Christianity. These holy men retreated to

the deserts of Egypt and Syria, seeking solitude and communion with God. Through their rigorous spiritual practices, they developed a deep understanding of the human soul and the path to spiritual transformation.

Among the desert fathers, St. John the Short was particularly known for his humility and wisdom. He often emphasized the importance of detachment from material possessions and the cultivation of inner peace. St. Arsenius, on the other hand, was known for his extreme asceticism and his ability to endure harsh living conditions. He believed that through physical suffering, one could attain spiritual purification. St. Moses the Black, who was once a slave before becoming a monk, was known for his compassion and his ability to guide others on the path of repentance.

In addition to the desert fathers, John Cassian, also known as John the Ascetic, played a significant role in the development of early Christian monasticism in the West. Born in what is now Romania, Cassian traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, studying under various monastic communities. He eventually settled in southern France, where he founded two monasteries and wrote extensively about monastic life.

Cassian's writings, which include the "Institutes" and the "Conferences," are considered essential texts for understanding the practices and beliefs of early Christian monks. He introduced the concept of "cenobitic monasticism," which emphasized communal living and obedience to a spiritual leader. Cassian also stressed the importance of prayer, meditation, and the study of Scripture as essential components of the monastic life.

Through their teachings and examples, the desert fathers and John Cassian left a lasting impact on the development of Christian spirituality. Their emphasis on self-denial, humility, and the pursuit of inner transformation continue to inspire and guide spiritual seekers to this day.



Review Questions

1. True or False. Patrology is a subset of theology. (A: True)
2. What is Patrology? (A: Patrology is the study of the early fathers.)
3. True or False. Patriarchs are not fathers. (A: False)
4. What are the two critical criteria for a saint to be considered a patriarch? (A: Firstly, the individual must be Orthodox, as well as their doctrines and teachings, to bring

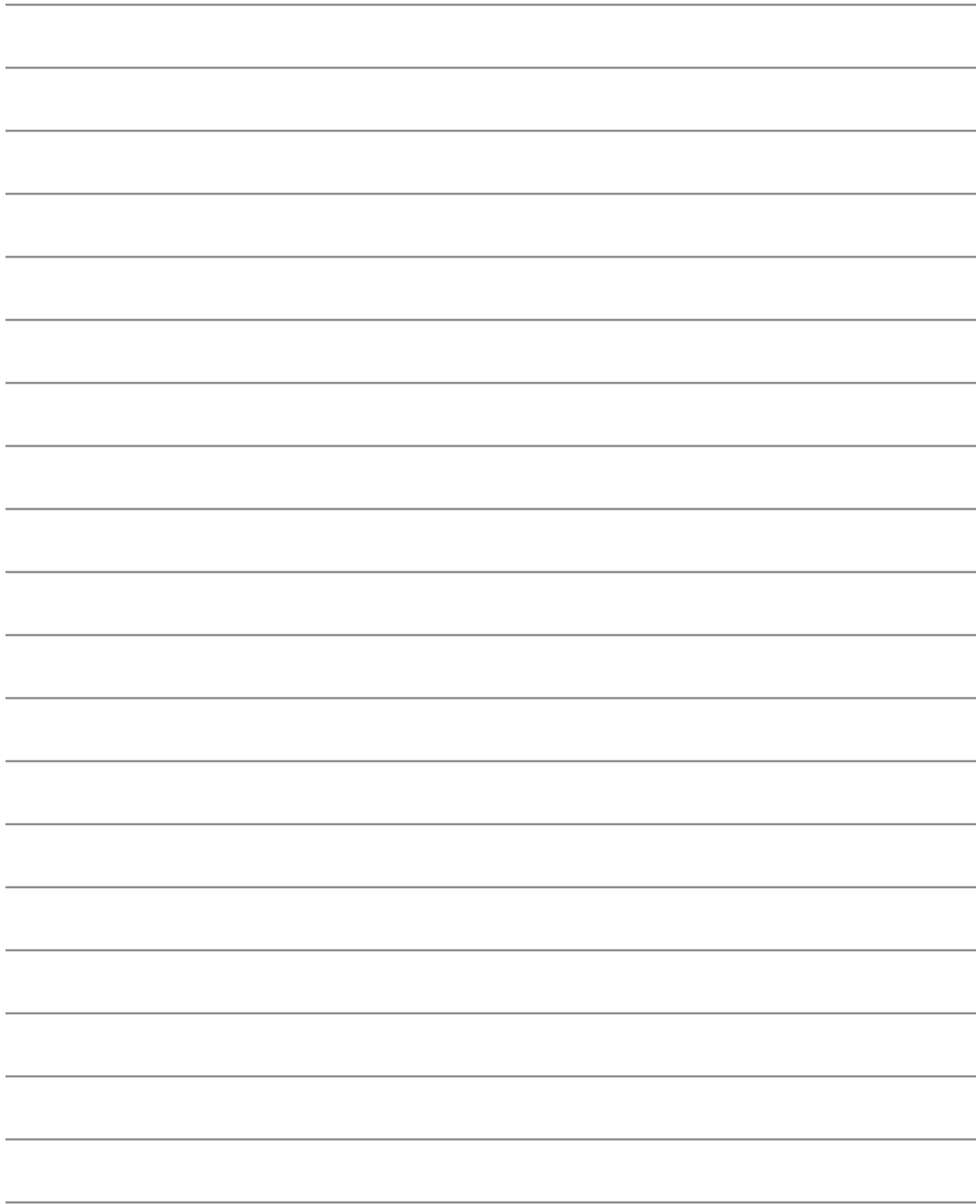
glory to God. Secondly, they must maintain a holy life in such a way that we may attain the evangelical spirit of the early church.)

5. The classification of the fathers and their Patristic writings will be reference based on either _____, _____, _____, _____. (A: time, location, language, material)



Books & References

1.  Lectures in Patrology, Fr. Tadros Malaty , accessed 23 July 2024, ...
2.  A Panoramic View of Patrology, Fr. Tadros Malaty , accessed 23 July 2024, ...
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1.1 *Introduction to Patristics*

The Apostolic Fathers

PATRISTICS

Who Are They?

The Apostolic Fathers were prominent theologians of the early Christian Church who lived during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. They are contemporaries of the Twelve Apostles and have been deeply influenced by their teachings. Their writings, although widely read and respected within the early Christian community, were ultimately excluded from the official canon of the New Testament.

The Apostolic Fathers lived and wrote during a formative period in Christian history. The church was still in its infancy, and the doctrines and practices of Christianity were still being developed. The Apostolic Fathers played a crucial role in shaping the early church's theological understanding and liturgical practices. Their writings, which include letters, homilies, and treatises, offer valuable insights into the beliefs and practices of the early church. These writings address various theological issues, such as the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit. They also discuss practical matters related to Christian ethics, church governance, and worship.

Some of the most notable Apostolic Fathers include St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Polycarp of Smyrna. St. Clement was the third bishop of Rome and wrote an influential letter to the church in Corinth. St. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch and wrote seven letters to various churches while he was being transported to Rome to face martyrdom. St. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna and was a disciple of the apostle John. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers provide a valuable bridge between the New Testament and the later church fathers. They offer a glimpse into the theological and spiritual world of the early church and shed light on the development of Christian thought and practice.

Although the writings of the Apostolic Fathers were not included in the New Testament canon, they have been treasured and studied by Christians throughout the centuries. Their writings continue

to inspire and challenge believers today, as they offer a glimpse into the faith and practices of the earliest followers of Jesus Christ.

St. Clement of Rome

His Identity and Apostolic Connections

St. Clement of Rome stands among the earliest and most venerated of the Apostolic Fathers. According to Tertullian, the Church of Rome held the tradition that St. Peter himself ordained Clement, and St. Jerome notes that in his time many in the Latin West regarded Clement as the immediate successor of the Apostle Peter.

Early Christian historians, including Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome, also identify him with the “fellow-laborer” of St. Paul mentioned in Philippians 4:3, further underscoring his close connection with the Apostles.

The Letter to the Corinthians

St. Clement is best known for his pastoral letter to the Church of Corinth, traditionally dated to the late first century. The Corinthian community had once again fallen into turmoil: a group of contentious individuals had stirred rebellion against their ordained leaders, jeopardizing the unity of the Church.

Although no formal appeal was made to Rome, St. Clement, writing on behalf of the Church of Rome, sent a letter with the purpose of restoring harmony and guiding the community back into peace.

At the beginning of the letter, St. Clement apologizes for the delay in addressing the matter, explaining that a series of unexpected calamities had recently afflicted the Roman Church. These troubles are widely understood to refer to the persecutions under the Emperor Domitian.

Praise, Reproof, and Exhortation

Clement begins by recalling the Corinthians’ earlier reputation for piety, hospitality, obedience, and good order. He grieves that jealousy has now led to bitter division, reminding them that jealousy was the cause of Cain’s murder of Abel, Esau’s anger, and countless other biblical tragedies. He even notes

that **jealousy and envy contributed to the martyrdom** of St. Peter, St. Paul, and many others in the early Church.

St. Clement calls the Corinthians to **repentance**, drawing upon the examples of the Patriarchs and the righteous from Israel's history. Above all, he urges them to imitate **the humility of Christ**, who came not to exalt Himself but to serve.

The Purpose and Spirit of the Letter

Clement's letter is a work of profound spiritual fatherhood. With both firmness and gentleness, he seeks to heal the wounds of division and reestablish unity within the Church. His counsel is rooted in Scripture, shaped by the apostolic tradition, and suffused with pastoral love.

Through this epistle, one of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, St. Clement of Rome continues to instruct the Church in the way of **peace, humility, and ecclesial harmony**.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

His Life and Apostolic Formation

St. Ignatius of Antioch, called *Theophorus* ("God-bearer"), was born around A.D. 50 in Syria. According to ancient tradition, he was a disciple of **St. John the Beloved** and later became the **third Bishop of Antioch**, succeeding St. Peter and Evodius in that great apostolic see. His life was marked by profound humility, ardent love for Christ, and unwavering fidelity to the Church.

Condemned under the Roman authorities, St. Ignatius was taken in chains from Antioch to Rome to face martyrdom. During this final journey, he composed **seven epistles**, which stand as treasures of early Christian theology and pastoral exhortation.

Themes of His Epistles

- **The Epistle to the Ephesians**

Written from Smyrna, this letter calls the faithful to **unity in love**, obedience to their bishop, and harmony within the Body of Christ.

- **The Epistle to the Magnesians**

Here St. Ignatius urges the believers to live in peace and to guard themselves against false doctrines, reminding them that true discipleship is expressed through humility and fidelity.

- **The Epistle to the Trallians**

He emphasizes the centrality of the **Eucharist** as the bond of unity and the mystery through which the faithful are nourished with the life of Christ.

- **The Epistle to the Romans**

This epistle is unique in tone and purpose. Ignatius pleads with the Christians in Rome not to interfere with his approaching martyrdom, longing to imitate Christ through his death. In one of the most famous lines of early Christian literature, he writes:

“I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.”

His words reveal a soul wholly consumed with love for the Lord.

- **The Epistle to the Philadelphians**

St. Ignatius exhorts the faithful to remain steadfast, holding firmly to the apostolic traditions, which safeguard the unity of the Church.

- **The Epistle to the Smyrnaeans**

Here he warns strongly against false teachers, affirming both the reality of Christ’s incarnation and the truth of His bodily presence in the Eucharist. He also provides early testimony to the structure of Church order—bishop, presbyters, and deacons.

- **The Epistle to St. Polycarp**

Addressed to his beloved friend and fellow bishop, this letter offers counsel on pastoral leadership, endurance, and the care of souls entrusted to the shepherd of the Church.

His Legacy and Witness

The epistles of St. Ignatius are among the earliest and clearest testimonies to the Church's faith in the Eucharist, apostolic succession, and ecclesial unity. They radiate the spirit of a man whose entire life was conformed to Christ, and whose approaching martyrdom was embraced as the ultimate act of love.

St. Ignatius's writings reveal not only theological depth but also profound pastoral warmth. They remain a timeless witness to the courage, sacrifice, and spiritual wisdom of one who bore the name *Theophorus*, a true God-bearer who sealed his confession of Christ with his life.

St. Polycarp of Smyrna

His Life and Apostolic Formation

St. Polycarp, one of the most beloved figures of the early Church, was born around A.D. 69 and became the long-standing Bishop of Smyrna. He was formed at the feet of St. John the Theologian, inheriting from him both the purity of doctrine and the spirit of apostolic love. St. Polycarp also maintained a close friendship with St. Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote to him during his final journey to martyrdom.

In A.D. 155, Polycarp himself sealed his confession of Christ by a cruel martyrdom. Bound and set aflame, he remained unharmed by the fire, which, according to the account, arched around him like a sheltering wind. He was then pierced with a dagger, offering his life as a final testimony to Christ. His martyrdom became one of the earliest, most detailed, and most cherished accounts of early Christian witness.

The Epistle to the Philippians

Although only a few of his writings survive, St. Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians shines as a work of pastoral warmth and theological clarity. Written in response to the Philippians' request for guidance, the letter addresses various disorders troubling the community and exhorts the faithful to persevere in virtue.

He encourages them to remain steadfast in the apostolic faith and in love for one another:

“Stand fast, therefore, in these things, and follow the example of the Lord, being firm and unchangeable in the faith, loving the brotherhood, and being attached to one another, joined together in the truth, exhibiting the meekness of the Lord in your intercourse with one another, and despising no one.”

Here Polycarp’s pastoral voice echoes the very spirit of the Apostles, calling the Church to humility, unity, and Christian endurance. One that he himself displayed in the days of his martyrdom.

The Letter to Diognetus

A second work, the Letter to Diognetus, has long been associated with St. Polycarp. While the true authorship remains uncertain, some traditions hold that it may have been written by him or by a disciple under his guidance. It is one of the most elegant and profound apologetic writings of the early Church, addressing themes such as:

- the vanity of idolatry,
- the limitations of Jewish ritualism when divorced from Christ,
- the distinctive life of Christians in the world,
- the revelation of Christ,
- the transformation brought by divine grace, and
- the blessings of faith and true knowledge.

Its chapters systematically present a luminous portrait of the early Christian worldview, revealing how believers lived as **“the soul of the world,”** set apart yet fully present within society.

Influence on St. Irenaeus

St. Polycarp’s legacy is further preserved through his disciple St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who frequently recalled the teachings and example of his mentor. Irenaeus describes how Polycarp spoke of his conversations with St. John and others who had seen the Lord, thus linking Irenaeus—and the generations after him—directly to the apostolic age.

Through Irenaeus’s testimony, we gain invaluable insight into Polycarp’s doctrine, character, and spiritual authority.

The Enduring Legacy of St. Polycarp

St. Polycarp remains a model of steadfast faith, pastoral charity, and courage in the face of suffering. His life reflects the continuity of the apostolic tradition, preserved not through speculation but through living holiness. His epistle, his martyrdom, and his influence on the next generation of Fathers continue to inspire the Church.

In St. Polycarp, the Church beholds a shepherd whose constancy and love remain a timeless call to perseverance, faithfulness, and unity in Christ.

The Didache

The Didache, also known as The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is an early Christian text that provides instructions on Christian living, moral conduct, and church organization. It is considered to be the oldest known manual of the early church. It has been revered throughout the ages, particularly in Egypt, where it was highly esteemed and often quoted by prominent figures such as St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Athanasius the Apostolic.

The Didache is divided into four main sections:

1. **The Two Ways:** This section presents two contrasting ways of life, one that leads to life and one that leads to death. It emphasizes the importance of choosing the way of life and following the teachings of Jesus.
2. **Moral Instructions:** This section provides practical guidance on various aspects of Christian living, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and avoiding slander and hypocrisy. It also includes instructions on how to treat others, including widows, orphans, and the poor.
3. **Church Organization:** This section describes the structure and roles within the early Christian community. It discusses the roles of apostles, prophets, teachers, and deacons, as well as the importance of submission to leaders and maintaining unity within the church.
4. **Eucharist and Baptism:** This section provides instructions on the celebration of the Eucharist (communion) and baptism. It describes the proper procedures for these sacraments and emphasizes their significance for Christian worship and discipleship.

The Didache is a valuable resource for understanding the beliefs and practices of the early Christian church. It offers insights into the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus, the structure of early Christian communities, and the importance of following a Christ-centered way of life.

One of the notable practices described in the Didache is the act of baptism. It emphasizes the practice of baptism by immersion, suggesting that it was the preferred method in the early church. The Didache encourages immersion in running water in rivers, which signifies the complete submersion of the individual being baptized. However, it recognizes that in cases of water scarcity or for individuals who are unable to leave their beds due to illness, baptism by pouring water from a vessel or from the hand is permissible. This accommodation demonstrates the Didache's understanding of practical considerations while upholding the spiritual significance of baptism.

Another essential aspect of Christian life highlighted in the Didache is fasting. It advocates for regular fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. These days were dedicated to prayer and reflection, as a means of spiritual purification and preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Day (Sunday). Fasting was believed to enhance one's spiritual receptivity and deepen their relationship with God.

Furthermore, the Didache emphasizes the importance of receiving the Holy Eucharist regularly. It considers the Eucharist to be a central act of worship and a source of spiritual nourishment for believers. By partaking in the Eucharist, Christians are united with Christ and with one another, forming a community of faith and love.

The Didache serves as a valuable window into the beliefs and practices of the early church, providing insights into the spiritual lives of the first Christians. Its teachings on baptism, fasting, and the Holy Eucharist continue to shape Christian traditions and practices to this day.

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas, often simply known as "The Shepherd," holds a significant place in Christian history as a literary work dating back to the late first half of the second century. It is recognized as a valuable book by many Christians and was even considered canonical scripture by some early Church fathers, including the esteemed Irenaeus.

The popularity of "The Shepherd" flourished among Christians during the second and third centuries. Its inclusion in the Codex Sinaiticus, an ancient manuscript of the Bible, further emphasizes its importance. Furthermore, its listing between the Acts of the Apostles and the Acts of Paul in the

Codex Claromontanus, another significant manuscript, speaks to its esteemed position within the early Christian canon.

The Shepherd is a multi-faceted work, consisting of five visions, twelve mandates, and ten parables. These components combine to create a rich tapestry of spiritual teachings and ethical guidance. Allegory plays a central role, providing symbolic representations of deeper spiritual truths.

One of the distinctive features of "The Shepherd" is its emphasis on the Church. It addresses the faithful directly, calling them to a profound repentance for the sins that have harmed the Church. This theme underscores the importance of personal accountability and the need for communal healing and reconciliation.

The Shepherd's enduring appeal lies in its timeless wisdom and practical insights. It invites readers to reflect on their spiritual journeys, confront their shortcomings, and embrace the transformative power of repentance. By embracing the messages found within "The Shepherd," Christians throughout history have found encouragement, hope, and guidance for their faith.

Papias of Hierapolis

Papias, a significant figure in early Christianity, flourished as a Greek Apostolic Father during the later half of the first century and the first half of the second century. He held the position of Bishop in Hierapolis, a city that is now known as Pamukkale in modern-day Turkey. Papias's contributions to Christian literature include the authorship of a seminal work titled "Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord," which consisted of five books. Unfortunately, the entirety of this work has been lost to time, except for brief fragments preserved through the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons, who lived approximately 180 AD, and Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived around 320 AD. Nevertheless, these fragments offer invaluable insights into Christian oral tradition and play a crucial role in shedding light on the origins of the canonical Gospels.

In his writings, Papias emphasized the importance of seeking truth and accuracy in religious teachings. He expressed his preference for learning from individuals who personally knew the apostles or were in direct contact with them, rather than relying solely on secondhand accounts or written records. Papias sought out firsthand information from those who had been in the presence of the apostles, including Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, and Matthew. He also sought the wisdom of Aristion and John the Elder, both of whom were disciples of the Lord.

"I shall not hesitate also to put into ordered form for you, along with the interpretations,

everything I learned carefully in the past from the elders and noted down carefully, for the truth of which I vouch. For unlike most people I took no pleasure in those who told many different stories, but only in those who taught the truth. Nor did I take pleasure in those who reported their memory of someone else's commandments, but only in those who reported their memory of the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the Truth itself. And if by chance anyone who had been in attendance on the elders arrived, I made enquiries about the words of the elders—what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and whatever Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from the books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice."

Papias's approach to gathering knowledge reflects his deep commitment to the authenticity and reliability of Christian tradition. He believed that personal encounters with those who had witnessed the teachings of Jesus Christ provided a more accurate and trustworthy source of information than written accounts alone. Papias's work serves as a valuable resource for understanding the early development of Christian doctrine and the formation of the New Testament canon. His emphasis on oral tradition and his dedication to preserving the teachings of the apostles continue to influence biblical scholarship and contribute to the ongoing study of early Christianity.



Review Questions

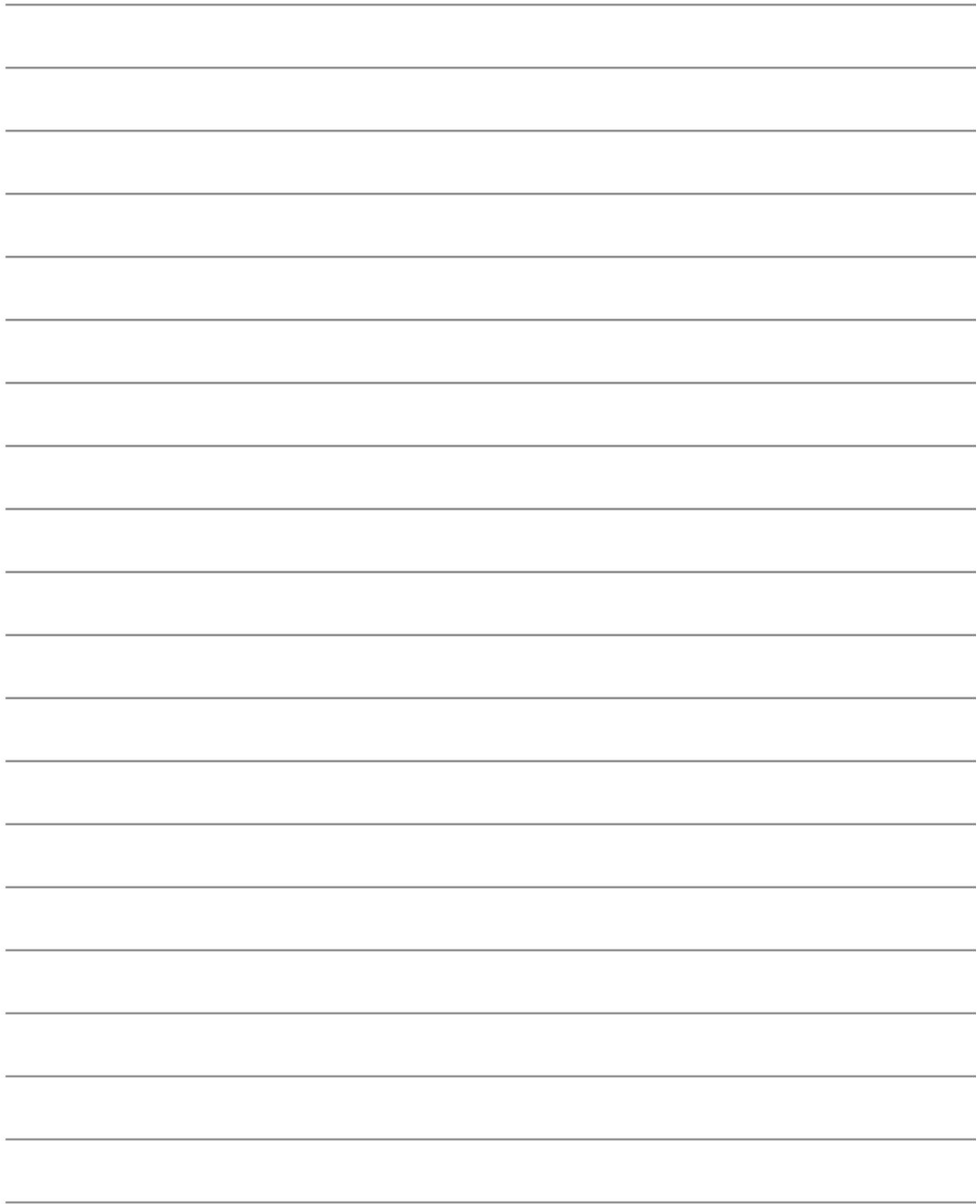
1. What is St. Clement famous for? (A: He is famous for his letter to the Corinthians.)
2. Who was St. Polycarp a teacher of? (A: He was the teacher of St. Irenaeus.)
3. Who are the Apostolic Fathers? (A: The Apostolic Fathers were core Christian theologians among the Church Fathers who lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.)
4. True or False? The Shepherd was written in the first half of the second century. (A: True)
5. True or False? Papias was a bishop in Turkey. (A: True)



Books & References

4.  Early-Christian-Writings-The-Apostolic-Fathers-by-Maxwell-Staniforth-Andrew-Louth.pdf ,

accessed 2 April 2024, ...



Unit 2

2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: Introduction & St. Basil

PATRISTICS

Who Were They?

The Cappadocian Fathers, also traditionally known as the three Cappadocians, were a group of influential Christian theologians who lived in the 4th century AD. They were St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In present-day Turkey, the Cappadocia region served as a significant site for early Christian practices, largely due to the missionary efforts of St. Paul. Cappadocians played a pivotal role in shaping early Christian beliefs, particularly the doctrine of the Trinity. They are highly venerated as saints in both Western and Eastern churches.

St. Basil the Great was the oldest of the three Cappadocians. He was born in Caesarea, Cappadocia, in 330 AD. He was a brilliant student and went on to study rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Caesarea and was ordained a priest. In 370 AD, he was elected bishop of Caesarea.

St. Gregory of Nyssa was born in Nyssa, Cappadocia, around 335 AD. He was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great. He was also a brilliant student and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Cappadocia and was ordained a priest. In 372 AD, he was elected bishop of Nyssa.

St. Macrina, the older sister of renowned saints St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, transformed the family's estate into a monastic community. The eldest among St. Macrina's brothers was St. Basil the Great. Another brother, St. Peter of Sebaste, also became a bishop. Their parents, St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia of Caesarea, are also recognized as saints.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus was born in Nazianzus, Cappadocia, in 329 AD. He was a close friend of St. Basil the Great. He was also a brilliant student and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Cappadocia and was ordained a priest. In 380 AD, he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople.

The Cappadocian Fathers were all gifted theologians and made significant contributions to the development of early Christian theology. They are particularly known for their work on the doctrine of the Trinity. They argued that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons but one God. This teaching became the orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity.

The Cappadocian Fathers were also influential in the development of monasticism. They founded several monasteries and convents in Cappadocia. These monasteries became centers of learning and spirituality.

Contributions to Theology

The Cappadocian Fathers, following in the footsteps of St. Athanasius, who championed Orthodox theology at the Nicene Council, continued the legacy of Orthodox theology. Their aim was to show that Christians could engage in intellectual discussions with Greek-speaking scholars and demonstrate that the Christian faith, while opposing many of the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers, was a distinct and scientific movement. At its core, Christianity focused on the healing of the human soul and union with God, exemplified by monasticism.

The Cappadocian Fathers made significant contributions to the definition of the Trinity, which was finalized at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. They also played a key role in the development of the final version of the Nicene Creed. Additionally, they made substantial contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity and provided responses to various theological challenges, including those posed by Eunomius, Sabellian Arianism, Apollinaris, and the Macedonians.

Essentially, the Cappadocian Fathers aimed to demonstrate that Christianity could hold its own in intellectual discussions and that it offered a unique and scientific approach to the human soul's healing and union with God. Monasticism served as the epitome of this approach.

Arianism and Semi-Arianism

Following the First Council of Nicea in 325 AD, Arianism, a theological movement that questioned the full divinity of Jesus Christ, persisted within the Christian Church. The Council had established the consubstantiality (homoousios) of the Son (Jesus Christ) with the Father (God), affirming that they shared the same divine substance or essence. However, the controversy surrounding Arianism continued.

Among the dissenting groups were the semi-Arians, who proposed a compromise position. They argued for a "like substance" (homoiousios) view, suggesting that the Son was "like" the Father in essence but not identical or co-eternal. This view contrasted with the outright Arians, who denied the Son's likeness to the Father altogether, considering him a created being rather than divine.

In response to these divergent viewpoints, the Cappadocian Fathers, a group of influential theologians led by St. Basil of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, sought to reconcile the semi-Arians with orthodox Christian doctrine. They employed a now-orthodox formula that emphasized "one substance (ousia) in three persons (hypostaseis)."

St. Basil of Caesarea, a prominent Cappadocian Father, used a Platonic parallel to illustrate this relationship. He proposed that just as three distinct human beings share a common universal, their humanity, so too do the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a single divine substance while maintaining their distinct personal identities. This formulation acknowledged the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity without compromising their essential unity:

"In a brief statement, I shall say that essence, (ousia) is related to person (hypostasis) as the general to the particular. Each one of us partakes of existence because he shares in ousia while because of his individual properties he is A or B. So, in the case in question, ousia refers to the general conception, like goodness, godhead, or such notions, while hypostasis is observed in the special properties of fatherhood, sonship, and sanctifying power. If then they speak of persons without hypostasis they are talking nonsense, ex hypothesi; but if they admit that the person exists in real hypostasis, as they do acknowledge, let them so number them as to preserve the principles of the homoousios in the unity of the godhead, and proclaim their reverent acknowledgment of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the complete and perfect hypostasis of each person so named."
(Epistle 214.4)

The Cappadocian Fathers' efforts helped to clarify and refine the doctrine of the Trinity, addressing criticisms that the Council of Nicea had obscured the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By emphasizing the unity of substance alongside the distinctness of persons, they laid the foundation for the orthodox understanding of the Trinity that continues to shape Christian theology today.

St. Basil the Great - Introduction

In the 4th century, as Arianism, semi-Arianism, and Eunomianism gained prominence within Christianity, a champion of faith arose. Amidst this theological landscape, St. Athanasius in Egypt, St. John Chrysostom in Greece, St. Ambrose in Italy, St. Augustine in North Africa, and St. Basil in Asia Minor emerged as staunch defenders of orthodoxy.

Born in 329 AD, St. Basil was nurtured by his sister, St. Macrina, alongside his brothers, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Peter of Sebaste. This extraordinary family, dedicated to serving the Lord, produced bishops and devoted individuals who left an indelible mark on the Church.

Growing up in the ungodly town of Cappadocia, Asia Minor, St. Basil received an exceptional education. His journey took him from Cappadocia to Constantinople and eventually to the prestigious School of Athens, where he forged a lifelong friendship with St. Gregory Nazianzen, also known as St. Gregory the Theologian, whose renowned Gregorian Liturgy we use to this day.

Upon returning to Cappadocia, St. Basil's brilliance shone as a successful lawyer and orator until a pivotal moment when his sister persuaded him to embrace a life of monasticism. Inspired by her spiritual wisdom, he relinquished his worldly possessions, distributing them among the poor. He then embarked on a transformative pilgrimage to Egypt's monasteries, seeking to immerse himself in the monastic way of life.

St. Basil's travels in Egypt left an indelible mark on his soul. He returned to Pontus, determined to establish monastic communities in the region. Drawing inspiration from the Egyptian monasteries, he emphasized quietude, devotion, and hard work as the cornerstones of monastic life. Through his tireless efforts, St. Basil became the first to establish monastic communities in the region, significantly contributing to the spread of Christianity and the preservation of orthodox teachings.

St. Basil the Great- Monastic Life

In his exemplary asceticism, St. Basil organized each day into precise hours dedicated to work, prayers, hymns, and alternating psalmody. His monks observed strict dietary restrictions, limited to a single daily meal of bread, water, and herbs. Sleep was permitted only until midnight, when all arose for further prayer.

His monasteries served as schools of holy faith, banished from the Sees of Asia by imperial decrees. Undeterred, St. Basil embarked on regular circuits of neighboring towns, preaching the Nicene faith to the populace. This practice was not uncommon in the early church, where orthodox

doctrine faced suppression by heretical bishops and magistrates. In such times, monasteries remained steadfast and fearless custodians of truth.

St. Basil's asceticism was renowned for its rigor. He consumed only what was essential for survival, owning just one inner and outer garment. At night, he slept on a hair skin placed directly on the floor. St. Gregory the Theologian described him as "without a wife, without property, without flesh, and almost without blood."

While his severe asceticism weakened his physical frame and health, it also planted the seeds of maladies that would ultimately claim his life in later years. Yet, despite his frail condition, sustained by his resolute will and indomitable spirit, St. Basil tirelessly traveled throughout Asia Minor, exerting monumental efforts in defense of truth.

St. Basil the Great - the Archbishop

In 370 AD, St. Basil became the Archbishop of Cappadocia and the neighboring regions. St. Athanasius conveyed his congratulations to Cappadocia in a letter, expressing that every province should feel envious of having a bishop like St. Basil. Although Emperor Valens attempted to enforce Arianism in the region, he could not intimidate St. Basil. In response, the Emperor dispatched his Prefect, Modestus, to intimidate and threaten St. Basil. The renowned exchange of words between Modestus and St. Basil remains a significant event in history.

St. Basil: *"Have you no other threat? For none of these things can reach me."*

Modestus: *"How indeed is that?"*

St. Basil: *"Because a man who has nothing is beyond the reach of confiscation, unless you demand my tattered rags. Banishment is impossible for me, who do not count any land as my own, but all to be God's, whose guest and dependent I am. As for tortures, what can they do to this body that scarcely exists? Death is my benefactor, who will send me to God all the quicker."*

Modestus: *"No one has ever spoken with such boldness to Modestus."*

St. Basil: *"Perhaps you have never before met a bishop."*

In the face of Basil's unwavering fortitude and defiance of intimidation or threats, the prefect's menacing demeanor transformed into respect and deference. Overwhelmed by St. Basil's fearless attitude, the prefect dismissed him from his presence. Emperor Valens, impressed and intimidated by St. Basil's unwavering faith, decided against employing harsh measures and instead sought to compel Arian bishops into communion with Cappadocia.

During the Epiphany of 372 AD, Valens approached the main church of Caesarea, astonished by what he witnessed. The church was flooded with a sea of worshippers, their synchronized chants resembling soft thunder. The clergy surrounded the altar in a semicircle, and amidst them stood St. Basil, immersed in prayer, utterly unfazed by the emperor's abrupt entrance.

The unearthly majesty of the scene, the awe-inspiring order of the immense throng that resembled angels rather than men, overwhelmed the emperor, causing him to almost faint. He would have fallen to the ground had it not been for a quick-thinking clergyman who seized him for support.

Moved by pity, St. Basil accepted a gift from Valens' trembling hand, engaging him in a discourse on the orthodox faith. However, Arians convinced Valens that St. Basil posed a threat, leading to an order for his exile. To prevent riots, Basil departed at night, but he was apprehended and brought to the palace to pray for Valens' ailing son. Valens' wife attributed the boy's illness to his treatment of St. Basil. St. Basil agreed to pray for the boy on the condition that he be baptized, and the illness miraculously left the child.

Arian bishops insisted he be baptized at an Arian baptism. After the Arians baptized him, the boy again got sick and died the same night. Arians again convinced Valens to exile St. Basil, but everytime he tried to sign, the pen refused to write and then broke in his hand, which scared the emperor to leave the city of Cappadocia altogether. After that incident, Modestus became sick and asked St. Basil to pray for him. St. Basil's prayers healed the Prefect and from then on they became friends and the church in Cappadocia was protected from then on.

St. Basil the Great - Theological Works

At the age of fifty, he succumbed to a liver illness, leaving behind an immense body of work. Among his notable contributions, the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil holds particular significance for us Copts, as it remains in use to this day.

Against Eunomius

This text, comprising five books, serves as a refutation of the heresy propagated by Eunomius. The crux of this heresy lies in the catchphrase, "we believe that ingenerateness or unbegottenness constitutes the essence of God." This implies that "begotten" denotes inferiority and dissimilarity. Consequently, since the Son is described as "only-begotten," He is deemed lesser than the Father, who alone stands supreme in His unbegottenness.

St. Basil elucidates that Eunomius erroneously conflates God's un-begottenness, which is a mere negative title we ascribe to Him, with God's essence, a concept that transcends human understanding and expression. St. Basil cites St. Paul's words: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" If the great apostle himself experienced vertigo while contemplating God's majesty, what arrogance is it for others to claim that they have fully comprehended His essence?

"It is a terrible thing for us to coin names for Him to whom God has given a 'name which is above every other name.' We must not add to or subtract from what is delivered to us by the Spirit. Things are not made for names but names for things."

On the Holy Spirit

In 325 AD, the Nicene Creed concluded with "we believe in the Holy Spirit," leaving the church's understanding of the Holy Spirit's divinity and role undefined. During the ensuing 56 years, an Arian faction emerged, denying both the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, leading to their designation as "Pneumatomachoi" or "fighters against the Spirit."

However, at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, this deficiency was addressed when the clause "the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshiped and glorified" was added to the creed, providing a clearer affirmation of the Holy Spirit's divinity.

St. Basil, in particular, had a profound understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in the Christian faith. He believed that through the Holy Spirit, believers experienced restoration to paradise, ascension to the kingdom of heaven, adoption as God's sons, and the ability to call God their Father. He also emphasized the Spirit's role in granting believers grace, being called "children of light," sharing in eternal glory, and inheriting the fullness of blessings in both this world and the world to come.

The Hexameron

The 'Six Days of Creation', commonly referred to as the hexameron, stands as a remarkable collection of nine homilies delivered by St. Basil the Great during the solemn period of Lent. These homilies focused on the profound subject of the universe's origin, as recounted in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis.

St. Basil's hexameron was not an isolated work within the patristic tradition. Numerous other prominent Church Fathers also composed their own series of homilies on the first six days of creation. Notable among these were St. John Chrysostom, whose eloquent discourses captivated his listeners,

St. Gregory of Nyssa, whose philosophical insights illuminated the text, St. Ambrose of Milan, whose practical applications were relatable, and Bede the Venerable, whose historical and allegorical interpretations enriched understanding.

This widespread attention to the first six days of Genesis reflects the profound reverence that the early Church Fathers held for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. They viewed these books as divinely inspired and authoritative, containing essential truths about God, creation, and humanity.

As a product of St. Basil's rigorous Athenian education, the hexameron exhibits a remarkable depth of analysis. He delved into a laborious examination of every verse and word of the creation narrative, leaving no detail unconsidered. St. Basil's aim was not merely to provide a superficial explanation of the text but to uncover its profound theological and philosophical implications.

St. Basil's hexameron was highly acclaimed during his lifetime and beyond. It was considered his most celebrated work, earning him widespread recognition as a gifted exegete and theologian. His homilies continue to captivate readers today, offering a timeless exploration of the wonder and mystery of creation and inspiring a deeper appreciation for the wisdom and beauty of Scripture.

The Letters

Throughout his lifetime, St. Basil engaged in an extensive correspondence with a diverse range of individuals, encompassing both friends and adversaries of the Christian faith. These letters serve as invaluable artifacts of Basilian literature, offering a vivid and firsthand glimpse into the saint's personal life and the historical events of his era.

The subject matter covered in these letters is remarkably varied, reflecting St. Basil's wide-ranging interests and expertise. They have been categorized into several distinct categories:

Letter Type	Description
Historical Letters	Provide insights into significant historical events and developments of St. Basil's time, such as the Arian controversy, the Council of Nicaea, and the political and social landscape of the Roman Empire.
Dogmatic Letters	Explore and expound on various doctrinal and theological issues, defending orthodox beliefs and refuting heretical teachings. Address topics such as the nature of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the relationship between faith and reason.

Moral and Ascetic Letters	Offer guidance and instruction on Christian living. Discuss virtues such as humility, charity, and temperance, emphasizing the importance of self-discipline, prayer, and detachment from worldly desires.
Disciplinary Letters	Address matters of church discipline and administration. Provide practical advice on issues such as the selection and training of clergy, the resolution of disputes among believers, and the maintenance of church order.
Consolatory Letters	Offer comfort and support to individuals facing various challenges and hardships. Demonstrate empathy and compassion, reminding recipients of the hope and strength found in faith.
Commendatory Letters	Recommend individuals for positions of trust and responsibility within the church or society. Highlight their virtues, abilities, and commitment to Christian principles.
Familiar Letters	Reveal a more personal side of St. Basil, as he corresponds with friends and family members. Provide glimpses into his daily life, his relationships, and his thoughts on various personal matters.

The letters of St. Basil transcend their historical context, offering timeless wisdom and guidance to believers across generations. They illuminate the saint's profound intellect, unwavering faith, and compassionate heart, making them a cherished resource for those seeking spiritual nourishment and deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

St. Basil the Great - Works of Mercy

St. Basil, known for his unwavering commitment to assisting the marginalized and needy, dedicated his life to serving the poor and needy. His philanthropic endeavors extended beyond the boundaries of Caesarea, reaching across Cappadocia and beyond. He established numerous hospitals, refuges, orphanages, and harbors of safety for various vulnerable populations.

One of his most notable philanthropic establishments was an enormous hospital for the poor in Caesarea, the capital city of Cappadocia. This hospital was a testament to St. Basil's unwavering commitment to providing comprehensive care for the sick and impoverished. The hospital featured a church, an episcopal residence, rooms for the clergy, hospices for the sick and poor, and even workshops for artisans and laborers.

Understanding the unique needs of individuals, St. Basil ensured that the hospital had a specialized department dedicated to the care of lepers. He personally tended to these individuals, demonstrating his deep compassion and unwavering dedication to serving the most marginalized

members of society. The hospital, due to its immense size, became renowned as the "New Town" and later "Basileiad."

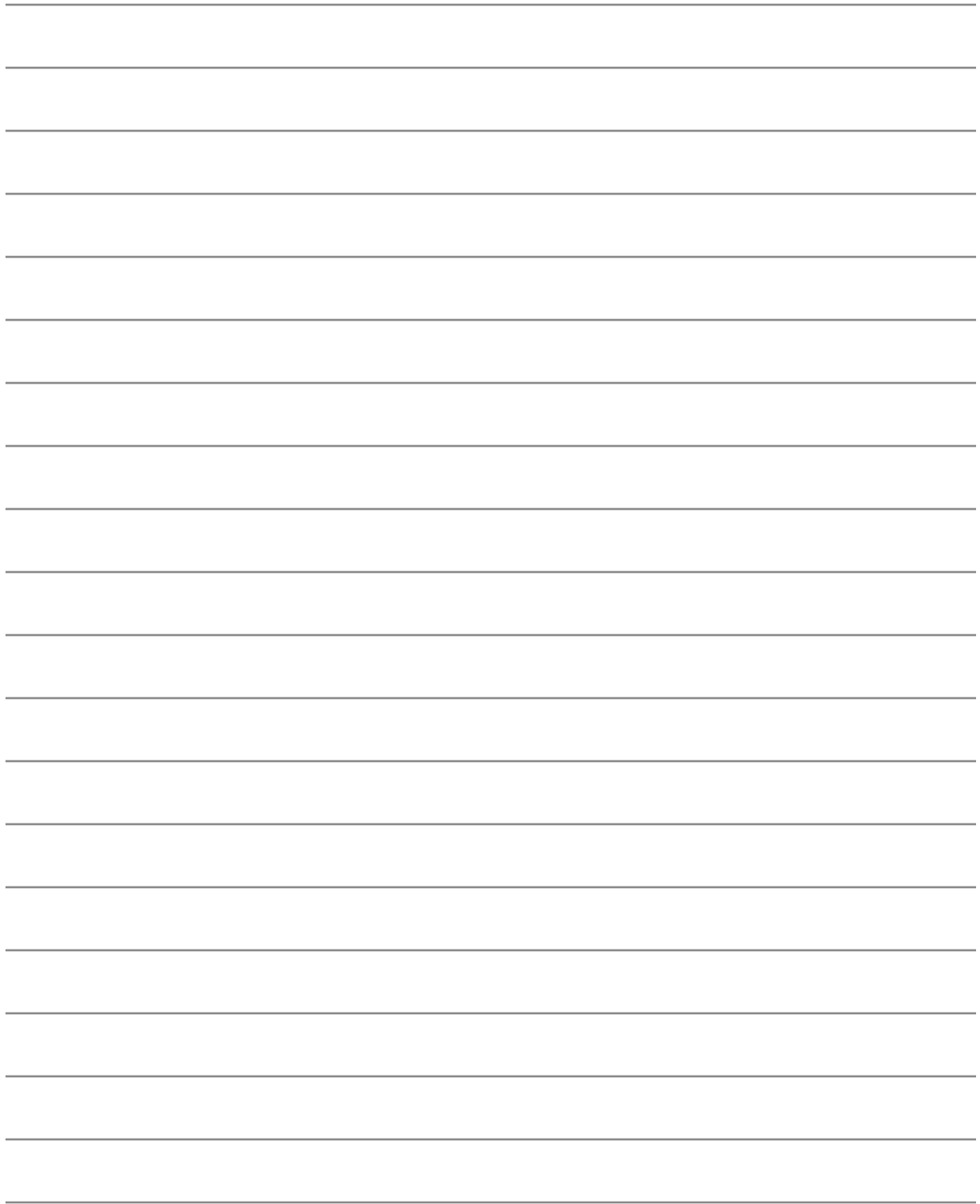
However, St. Basil's philanthropic work was not without its challenges. His enemies, envious of his influence and popularity, used the hospital as a pretext to denounce him to the governor. They falsely accused him of attempting to seize undue power for himself. St. Basil, with his characteristic wisdom and eloquence, defended himself by reminding the governor that the hospital's existence and services were in the best interests of the community. He emphasized that his sole intention was to alleviate suffering and provide a haven for those in need.

St. Basil's unwavering commitment to serving the poor and needy, exemplified by the establishment of the hospital in Caesarea, continues to inspire generations. His legacy serves as a reminder of the transformative power of compassion, service, and the ability to make a lasting impact on the lives of others.



Review Questions

1. Who were the three Cappadocians? (A: St. Basil the Great, his younger brother: Gregory of Nyssa, and a close friend, St. Gregory of Nazianzus.)
2. When was the Creed written up? (A: 325 AD)
3. What heresy did St. Basil fight against? (A: The heresy by Eunomius.)
4. What are The 'Six Days of Creation' also known as? (A: The hexameron.)
5. True or false? St. Basil and Modestus had a famous exchange. (A: True)
6. Name one of St. Basil's accomplishments. (A: He wrote our most used Divine Liturgy.)
7. Name three aspects of St. Basil's asceticism and how rigorous it was. (A: He ate only what was necessary, owned one inner and one outer garment, and at night he slept in hair skin on the floor.)
8. Which emperor could *not* stand up to St. Basil regarding Arianism? (A: Emperor Valens)
9. Name some of his works of mercy. (A: He was always serving the poor and needy. He built many hospitals for the poor, refuges for virgins, orphanages, as well as harbors of safety for slaves.)
10. What was St. Basil's, "New Town," establishment later named? (A: Basileiad)



2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: St. Gregory of Nyssa

PATRISTICS

A blessed family

St. Gregory, a remarkable figure in the history of Christianity, was the sibling of the esteemed St. Basil the Great. Their familial bond extended beyond mere bloodline, as the two brothers shared a profound intellectual and spiritual connection. In collaboration with other luminaries of the early Church, such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa contributed to a substantial legacy of theological thought, liturgical practices, and spiritual literature that continues to shape Eastern Christianity to this day.

The significance of their collective work lies in its interpretation of Eastern Christianity's theology, liturgical structure, and the very nature of God. Through their writings and teachings, St. Gregory and his brother St. Basil played a pivotal role in establishing our understanding of the Trinity and the distinctive nature of Christ within it.

St. Gregory, in particular, expressed his deep gratitude for his elder brother's guidance and mentorship in a letter addressed to St. Peter. He referred to St. Basil as "our father and master," acknowledging the profound influence St. Basil had on both himself and their younger brother. St. Basil's wisdom, piety, and unwavering commitment to the faith left an enduring mark on St. Gregory, shaping his own theological perspectives and spiritual journey.

Together, St. Gregory and St. Basil formed an intellectual powerhouse, delving into profound theological discussions and exploring the mysteries of faith. Their collaboration resulted in a rich body of literature that addressed various aspects of Christian doctrine, including the nature of God, the role of Christ in salvation, and the significance of the sacraments. Their writings not only influenced their contemporaries but also continue to inspire and guide believers throughout history.

St. Gregory's contributions to Eastern Christianity cannot be overstated. His theological insights, liturgical innovations, and spiritual writings have left an indelible mark on the faith and practice of millions of believers. Through his collaboration with St. Basil the Great and other influential

figures of his time, St. Gregory helped shape the contours of Eastern Christianity and laid the foundation for its enduring legacy.

His Life

In 335 A.D., St. Basil was born and received a quality education. His younger brother, St. Gregory, however, had a different path in mind. St. Gregory initially pursued a career as a teacher of rhetoric, studying the art of effective public speaking and writing. However, his family, including his powerful bishop brother, St. Basil, did not approve of his choice and urged him to serve the Church. Despite their initial disagreements, St. Basil, along with St. Gregory's friends and sister, St. Macrina, eventually convinced him to become a priest. Soon after, St. Gregory was elevated to Bishop of Nyssa. Like his brother, he devoted his life to defending the Christian faith against the challenges posed by the Arians.

St. Gregory of Nyssa faced numerous hardships and conflicts throughout his life. Despite being falsely accused by heretics, he was deposed twice from his position as bishop. However, in 378 AD, justice prevailed, and he was finally restored to his see. However, the following year, his beloved brother, St. Basil the Great, passed away. The two brothers shared a deep bond, and St. Gregory was profoundly grieved by this loss. To honor his brother's memory, St. Gregory composed a moving funeral oration and dedicated himself to completing St. Basil's unfinished work, the *Hexaemeron*. This series of nine sermons, delivered during Great Lent, explored and elaborated upon the Genesis account of the world's creation in six days.

St. Gregory's trials and tribulations did not end there. The following year, he experienced another loss when his sister, St. Macrina, also passed away. To preserve her legacy, St. Gregory authored a hagiography, meticulously detailing her life and virtues.

Amidst these personal sorrows, St. Gregory remained steadfast in his commitment to defending Orthodoxy. He attended the Council of Antioch, a local synod, where he passionately advocated for the perpetual virginity of the Theotokos (Mother of God). The council's objective was to refute a heresy that denied this fundamental tenet. Additionally, the council forbade the worship of the Theotokos as God or part of the Godhead, emphasizing the distinction between divine and human nature.

Concurrently, St. Gregory continued his tireless fight against Arianism, a heresy that challenged the divinity of Christ. He played a pivotal role in the Second Ecumenical Council held in

Constantinople, where the final section concerning the Holy Spirit was added to the Nicene Creed. This addition solidified the understanding of the Trinity as consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

His Works

St. Gregory's prolific theological endeavors and voluminous correspondence contribute an eloquent and intellectually distinctive body of knowledge to Orthodox theology and spirituality. His profound understanding of Christian beliefs is evident in his seminal work, the 'Catechism,' which serves as a testament to his theological acumen.

In his 'Life of Moses,' St. Gregory presents a mystical portrayal of God that is both audacious and humble, offering insights that remain unparalleled in Christian thought. His letters are characterized by their elegance, grace, and beauty, foreshadowing a writing and thinking style that would not emerge until the Romantic era of Western literature, over a millennium later.

St. Gregory possessed a rare gift for language, wielding it with skill and precision to persuade, engage the senses, and illuminate the intellect. This attribute set him apart from his contemporaries and even among the early Church Fathers. He reveled in the power of words, recognizing their capacity to transform hearts and minds.

St. Gregory's theological contributions extend beyond his written works. As a gifted speaker, he captivated audiences with his eloquence and passion. His sermons and homilies were renowned for their clarity, depth, and spiritual insight. He possessed a unique ability to communicate complex theological concepts in a manner that was both accessible and inspiring.

St. Gregory's legacy continues to influence Orthodox theology and spirituality to this day. His writings have been translated into numerous languages and continue to be studied and revered by scholars and laypeople alike. His insights into the nature of God, the human condition, and the path to salvation offer a timeless source of wisdom and guidance for believers seeking a deeper understanding of their faith.

Triadology

St. Gregory of Nyssa is principally remembered for two substantial contributions to the field of theology. Foremost among these is his doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which further developed the

theological understandings of his contemporary, St. Basil the Great, and their mutual friend, St. Gregory the Theologian.

Following the lead of St. Basil, St. Gregory proposed a thought-provoking analogy to comprehend the three "Persons" of the Trinity. He suggested that we can envision them along the lines of three members belonging to the same class. Similar to how Peter, Paul, and Timothy can be considered three distinct individuals, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be understood as three distinct entities.

But why, then, do we not acknowledge them as three separate Gods? St. Gregory addresses this question by pointing out a crucial distinction. Typically, we can differentiate between members of the same class based on observable physical characteristics such as shape, size, and color. Even if they appear identical, they occupy different positions in space. However, these criteria are inapplicable to incorporeal beings like God.

Even lesser spiritual beings possess varying degrees of goodness that allow us to distinguish between them, but this distinction is also irrelevant in the case of God. Therefore, the only way to discern the three "Persons" of the Trinity from one another is through their mutual relationships.

In St. Gregory's words, "it is impossible to think of one member of the Trinity without thinking of the others too." He likens them to a chain of three inseparable links, each pulling the others along. This profound analogy encapsulates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Trinity.

Infinite, without beginning

St. Gregory's second significant contribution was his spiritual theology, in which he argued for the infinity of God. He countered the prevailing view of the time, influenced by Origen, which posited that God was limited. In Platonic philosophy, limitation was seen as essential for clarity and knowability. However, St. Gregory contended that if God were limited, it would imply the existence of something greater than God, which would contradict the concept of an all-encompassing and supreme being.

Drawing inspiration from neoplatonic philosophers like Plotinus, St. Gregory asserted that God is without boundaries, unbounded by any external force or concept. He argued that God's infinity defied human comprehension, as any attempt to grasp the entirety of God's essence would be futile. He is the first Christian to defend it, apart from some hints in the work of St. Irenaeus.

In contrast to Origen's notion of a spiritual journey characterized by increasing illumination and knowledge of God through Scripture, St. Gregory maintained that God's infinity rendered him incomprehensible to the human mind. He emphasized that the mystical experience was not about acquiring more information about God but about coming to terms with the unfathomable nature of the divine.

St. Gregory's spiritual theology had a profound impact on Christian thought and influenced subsequent theologians. His emphasis on the infinity and incomprehensibility of God challenged traditional conceptions of the divine and encouraged a deeper contemplation of the mystery of God's being.

Stages of Spiritual Progression

In his spiritual journey, St. Gregory identifies three distinct stages of spiritual progression. The first stage is characterized by an initial darkness or ignorance, where the individual is not yet aware of the spiritual realm. This stage is followed by spiritual illumination, where the individual experiences a sense of connection to the divine and receives insights into the nature of reality. However, the journey does not end there. St. Gregory emphasizes that there is a final stage, a darkness of the mind in contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended. This is known as apophatic theology, which holds that God is beyond human understanding and cannot be fully grasped by human concepts or language.

St. Gregory draws upon the story of Moses as an allegory for this spiritual journey. Moses' first encounter with God occurs at the burning bush, a theophany of light and illumination. This represents the initial stage of spiritual awakening, where the individual experiences a glimpse of the divine. However, Moses' journey continues, and he later encounters God in the cloud, where he realizes that God cannot be seen by the eyes. This symbolizes the second stage, where the individual comes to understand that God cannot be limited to physical or sensory perception.

Finally, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and enters the "divine darkness." Here, he realizes that God cannot be known by the mind either. This is the third and final stage of spiritual progression, where the individual transcends rational thought and logic to experience a direct and ineffable connection with the divine. St. Gregory emphasizes that it is only through not-knowing and not-seeing that God can, paradoxically, be known and seen. This concept of unknowing as a path to knowledge

became highly influential in both Western and Eastern spirituality, thanks in part to the mystical writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

St. Gregory's ideas on spiritual progression and apophatic theology have had a profound impact on the development of mystical and contemplative traditions. He is widely regarded as a major figure in the history of these disciplines, offering insights into the nature of spiritual experience and the limitations of human understanding when it comes to comprehending the divine.

Epektasis, Constant Progress

Related to this is St. Gregory's idea of epektasis or constant progress. Platonic philosophy, which significantly influenced early Christian thought, held that stability represented perfection, while change signified deterioration. In contrast to this view, St. Gregory envisioned the ideal of human perfection as an ongoing journey of spiritual growth and moral excellence. He rejected the notion that perfection meant reaching a static, unchanging state. Instead, he emphasized the importance of continuous progress in virtue and godliness.

In St. Gregory's theological framework, God himself exists as the epitome of unchanging perfection. God has always been and will always remain perfect, without any need for improvement or transformation. However, humanity, in contrast, has a different trajectory. After the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, humans were left in a state of imperfection and separation from God. The goal for humanity, according to St. Gregory, is not to return to an unchanging state of perfection but to embark on a continuous journey of becoming more and more perfect, striving to become more united to God.

Another significant aspect of St. Gregory's teachings relates to the question of universal salvation. While some early Christian theologians, such as Origen, speculated about the possibility of the salvation of all humans, St. Gregory took a more cautious approach. He acknowledged that it is impossible to know definitively whether or not all humans will be saved. However, he offered a hopeful alternative to theologies like that of St. Augustine, which suggested that at least some individuals were predestined to eternal condemnation. St. Gregory taught that faithful Christians should hold onto the hope and pray for the salvation of all, even after death. He believed that God's love and mercy extended beyond the boundaries of earthly life, offering the possibility of redemption and transformation even beyond the grave.

St. Gregory of Nyssa on Virtues

The virtuous life begins with free will. It is a choice that flows from the deepest part of our being, a choice for goodness and truth. This choice causes distress to tyrants, for it undermines their power and authority. Virtue is not something that can be imposed from the outside; it must come from within. “When we lay bare the hidden meaning of history, scripture is seen to teach that the birth which distresses the tyrant is the beginning of the virtuous life. I am speaking of the kind of birth in which free will serves as the midwife, delivering the child amid great pain. For no one causes grief to his antagonist unless he exhibits in himself those marks which give proof of his victory over the other.” (from *The Life of Moses*)

Unlike other pleasures, virtue is timeless and constantly fresh. It does not fade with time or become stale. This is because virtue is not based on external circumstances, but on our inner being. It is a quality of character that we carry with us wherever we go. “A greedy appetite for food is terminated by satiety and the pleasure of drinking ends when our thirst is quenched. And so it is with the other things... But the possession of virtue, once it is solidly achieved, cannot be measured by time nor limited by satiety. Rather, to those who are its disciples it always appears as something ever new and fresh.”

The soul follows Moses (commandments) and the cloud (spiritual meaning) to advance in virtue. This journey is not always easy. There are times when we must cross the Sea (purification), defeating enemies (temptations), tasting bitter life (suffering), and enjoying gospel springs and living water (grace and mercy). But if we persevere, we will eventually reach our destination: the contemplation of transcendent Being.

The contemplation of transcendent Being is the ultimate goal of the virtuous life. It is a state of perfect happiness and fulfillment. In this state, we are united with God and experience the fullness of His love. “The soul has followed Moses and the cloud, both of these serving as guides for those who would advance in virtue; Moses here represents the commandments of the Law; and the cloud that leads the way, its spiritual meaning. The soul has been purified by crossing the Sea; it has removed itself from and destroyed the enemy army. It has tasted of the waters of Marah, that is, of life deprived of all sinful pleasure; and this at first had seemed bitter and unpleasant to the taste but offered a sensation of sweetness to those who accepted the wood. Next it enjoyed the beauty of the palm trees of the gospel and the springs; it filled itself with the living water, that is, the rock. It took within itself the bread of heaven. It overwhelmed the foreign host—a victory due to the extended arms of the

Lawgiver, which thus foreshadowed the mystery of the Cross. Only then can the soul go on to the contemplation of transcendent Being.”

His Writings

St. Gregory, a prominent figure in the early Church, left behind a significant body of works that encompass various genres and address a wide range of theological, philosophical, and practical topics. Among his writings are dogmatic treatises against Eunomius, in which he refuted the heretical teachings of Eunomius of Cyzicus, who denied the full divinity of Christ. These treatises demonstrate St. Gregory's unwavering commitment to upholding orthodox Christian doctrine.

In addition to his dogmatic works, St. Gregory also produced ascetic and moral treatises on virginity and other topics related to spiritual growth and ethical conduct. These treatises provide valuable insights into his understanding of the Christian life and his emphasis on moral purity and the pursuit of virtue.

St. Gregory's philosophical works explore profound questions about the nature of humanity and the soul. His treatise "On the Making of Man" delves into the creation and purpose of humankind, while his work "On the Soul" examines the intricate relationship between the soul and the body. These philosophical inquiries reflect St. Gregory's deep intellectual curiosity and his desire to understand the mysteries of human existence.

Among his apologetic works, "The Great Catechism" stands out as a comprehensive exposition of Christian doctrine intended for catechumens preparing for baptism. In this work, St. Gregory systematically presents the fundamental beliefs and practices of Christianity, providing a clear and accessible guide for those seeking to deepen their faith.

St. Gregory's oratorical skills are evident in his funeral oration, which eloquently expresses his grief and profound respect for the deceased. This oration showcases his ability to craft moving and emotionally resonant language that resonates with his audience.

Lastly, St. Gregory's numerous letters encompass a wide range of topics and addressees, making up his most extensive body of writing. These letters offer a glimpse into his personal life, relationships, and pastoral concerns. They reveal his dedication to guiding and supporting his flock, his wisdom in resolving conflicts, and his compassionate response to the needs of others.

Through his diverse works, St. Gregory left a lasting legacy as a prolific writer, theologian, philosopher, and pastor. His writings continue to inspire and guide believers, providing insights into

the mysteries of faith, the pursuit of holiness, and the search for deeper understanding of human nature and the divine.

Category	Works
Dogmatic Treatises	against Eunomius, Triadology
Ascetic and Moral Treatises	On virginity, on infants' early deaths, and on pilgrimages
Philosophical Works	On the making of man, on the soul and the resurrection, and 'The Life of Moses'
Apologetic Works	'The Great Catechism'
Oratorical Works	'Funeral Oration on Meletius,' as well as regarding the baptism of Christ
Letters	To Eusebius, to the city of Sebasteia, to Ablabius, to Cynegius, regarding a testimonial, to Stagirus, to a friend, to a student of the classics, an invitation, to Libanius, a second letter to Libanius, on his work against Eunomius, to the Church at Nicomedia, to the Bishop of Melitene, to Adelphius the lawyer, to Amphilochius, to Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa, lastly, to Flavian



Review Questions

1. Who is St. Gregory's brother? (A: St. Basil the Great)
2. What is St. Gregory's first main contribution? (A: His doctrine on the Holy Trinity.)
3. What is St. Gregory's second main contribution? (A: He argued for the infinity of God.)

4. Name one of St. Gregory's great works. (A: The Life of Moses.)
5. True or false? St. Gregory believed humanity's goal is to become more and more perfect, like God, and that someday it could be achievable. (A: False)
6. True or false? St. Gregory was happy to be a cleric. (A: False)
7. True or false? St. Gregory had a good education. (A: True)
8. What are St. Gregory's three stages of spiritual progression? (A: initial darkness or ignorance, spiritual illumination, and a darkness of the mind in contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended.)
9. True or false? In St. Gregory's theology, God himself has always been perfect and has never changed. (A: True)
10. Name three people he wrote letters to. (Sample A: Libanius, Flavian, and Stagarius.)



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal grey lines.

2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: St. Gregory the Theologian

PATRISTICS

A Pillar of Christian Thought and Eloquence

St. Gregory the Theologian, also revered as St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory the Younger, stands as a towering figure in the history of the Christian Church. Born in the 4th century, his influence as a great father and teacher of the Church remains profound.

Ordained as the Archbishop of Constantinople, St. Gregory possessed exceptional rhetorical skills, widely regarded as the most accomplished orator of the patristic age. His eloquent sermons and theological writings continue to inspire and captivate believers worldwide.

St. Gregory, alongside St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, forms the illustrious trio known as the Three Holy Hierarchs. These three Cappadocian Fathers played a pivotal role in shaping Christian thought and practice, leaving an indelible mark on the development of theology and spirituality.

St. Gregory's classical education as an orator and philosopher enabled him to infuse Hellenistic philosophy into the early Church. His ability to synthesize Greek thought with Christian theology laid the foundation for Byzantine theologians and church officials. He left an enduring legacy in the realm of Trinitarian theology, significantly influencing both Greek- and Latin-speaking theologians. St. Gregory, along with St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, earned the title of "Trinitarian Theologian" for their profound insights into the relationship among the three Persons of the Trinity.

Remarkably, much of St. Gregory's theological work remains influential in contemporary theological discourse. His exploration of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continues to shape our understanding of the Trinity, providing a deep and meaningful framework for comprehending the nature of God.

St. Gregory the Theologian's contributions to the Church extend far beyond his theological writings. As a bishop, he tended to the spiritual needs of his flock with compassion and dedication. His

commitment to social justice and his advocacy for the poor and marginalized earned him the respect and admiration of his contemporaries.

His Education

St. Gregory Nazianzus was born in Arianzus, Cappadocia, in 329 AD. His father, Gregory the Elder, became Bishop of Nazianzus, and his mother, Nonna, was a devout Christian. Both of his parents, as well as his brother Caesarius and sister Gorgonia, are recognized as saints by the Church.

St. Gregory's early education began in Caesarea of Palestine, where he studied rhetoric and philosophy. He then traveled to Alexandria, which was renowned for its philosophical and theological schools. In Alexandria, he delved deeper into the study of theology and came under the influence of the great Alexandrian teachers.

From Alexandria, St. Gregory set sail for Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world. However, as his ship sailed across the Mediterranean Sea, a violent storm erupted. St. Gregory, who had not yet been baptized, feared for his life and salvation. In desperation, he cried out to God, promising to dedicate his life to Him if he was spared. Miraculously, the storm ceased, and St. Gregory was deeply moved by this experience.

Upon arriving in Athens, St. Gregory reunited with his childhood friend, St. Basil the Great. Their friendship blossomed into a lifelong bond of brotherly love and mutual respect. Another notable fellow student in Athens was the young Prince Julian, who would later become known as Julian the Apostate. Julian initially professed Christianity but later renounced his faith and actively promoted paganism during his reign as emperor. Even in Athens, before Julian's apostasy, St. Gregory recognized his unsettled mind and warned others about the potential danger he posed to the Roman State. Even in Athens, before Julian had thrown away his faith, St. Gregory saw what an unsettled mind he had, and said, "What an evil the Roman State is nourishing." (Orat. V, 24, PG 35:693) St. Gregory here clearly depicts the impacts of an environment to one's thoughts and salvation.

Consecration and Bishopric

After completing their studies in Athens, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus became Saint Basil the Great's fellow ascetic, adopting the monastic lifestyle alongside him for a period within the remote hermitages of Pontus. Saint Gregory's father, also named Gregory, recognized his son's spiritual devotion and ordained him as a presbyter of the Church of Nazianzus. Subsequently, Saint Basil, in his

capacity as Bishop of Caesarea, consecrated Saint Gregory as the Bishop of Sasima (or Zansima), which fell within the archdiocese of Caesarea.

However, this consecration proved to be a source of profound sorrow for Saint Gregory, leading to a period of misunderstanding between him and Saint Basil. Despite this temporary strain, Saint Gregory's unwavering love and admiration for Saint Basil remained unchanged. This love is evident in his moving Funeral Oration (Orat. XLIII) dedicated to Saint Basil, a testament to the enduring bond between these two remarkable figures.

St. Gregory in Constantinople

After the untimely demise of Valens, Theodosius, a staunch advocate of the Nicene Creed, assumed leadership. During this period, numerous local synods convened, and among the notable participants was St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In 375, St. Gregory had secluded himself within a monastery located in Seleukia, yet he agreed to actively engage in these discussions.

During his time attending these gatherings, St. Gregory's cousin, Theodosia, generously offered him a villa to serve as his residence. With characteristic zeal, St. Gregory promptly transformed a significant portion of the villa into a church, which he named Anastasia, a symbolic representation of "a scene for the resurrection of the faith." It was from this modest chapel that St. Gregory delivered five impactful discourses expounding on the doctrines of the Nicene Creed, meticulously elucidating the nature of the Holy Trinity and emphasizing the unity of the Godhead.

Emperor Theodosius, steadfast in his resolve to eradicate Arianism, took decisive action by expelling Bishop Demophilus from his position. Subsequently, St. Gregory the Theologian, a prominent figure revered for his theological prowess, was elevated as Archbishop of Constantinople. In 381, Theodosius convened the Second Council of Constantinople, over which St. Gregory presided. During this council, Macedonius, who had previously served as Archbishop of Constantinople, was condemned as an adversary of the Holy Spirit, a grave offense that could not be tolerated. The council's deliberations and decisions played a pivotal role in shaping the theological landscape of the time, solidifying the Nicene Creed as the orthodox standard and further marginalizing Arianism and other dissenting views.

Two years elapsed, and when St. Gregory departed from Constantinople, the once-flourishing Arian sect, which espoused a heretical understanding of Christ's divinity, found itself utterly

vanquished within the city's walls. Not a single Arian church remained standing, a testament to the transformative power of St. Gregory's teachings.

St. Gregory diligently guided the Church until the year 382, when he delivered his farewell address, known as the Syntacterion. This momentous speech, witnessed by an august assembly of 150 bishops and graced by the presence of Emperor Theodosius the Great, served as a resounding affirmation of the divinity of the Son. With profound humility, St. Gregory requested permission to retire from the See of Constantinople, a request granted by all in attendance. In a humble expression, St. Gregory, never having desired the responsibility and wanting to escape it like Jonah, boldly and humbly proclaimed: "Let me be as the Prophet Jonah! I was responsible for the storm, but I would sacrifice myself for the salvation of the ship. Seize me and throw me... I was not happy when I ascended the throne, and gladly would I descend it."

Returning to his beloved Nazianzus, St. Gregory spent the remainder of his days in contemplation and reflection. He continued to minister to his flock, offering spiritual counsel and guidance. At the age of 62, in the year 391, St. Gregory of Nazianzus passed from this earthly realm, leaving behind a legacy that would forever shape the course of Christian thought and practice.

Liturgical Works

St. Gregory the Theologian, a prominent figure in the Coptic Church, is renowned for his masterful composition of the Divine Liturgy to the Son. This liturgy holds a special place in the Coptic liturgical calendar and is celebrated primarily during the Major Feasts of our Lord. St. Gregory's exceptional eloquence and breadth of learning are evident in his extensive writings, which encompass both prose and poems in various forms.

The beauty of his writings surpasses that of the Greek writers of antiquity, earning him the surname "Theologian." Moreover, St. Gregory is particularly acclaimed as the "Trinitarian Theologian" due to his frequent references to the Trinity and the singular essence and nature of the Godhead in his sermons.

Some of the following excerpts show the beauty of his poetical style and eloquent display of theological knowledge. St. Gregory states in the liturgy that: "Ineffable is the power of Your wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love toward mankind. You, as Lover of Mankind, have created me, as man. You had no need of my servitude, but rather I had need of Your lordship. Because of the multitude of Your tender mercies, You have brought me into existence when I

was not. You have raised heaven as a roof for me, and established the earth for me to walk upon...You have not left me in need of any of the works of Your honor.” Additionally, he mentions that: “You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation.” Furthermore, he states: “For my sake, O my Master, You have not hidden Your face from the shame of spitting.” Moreover, St. Gregory includes this: “You have come to the slaughter as a sheep, even to the Cross.” Also, he mentions that: “I offer You, O my Master, the symbols of my freedom. I write my works according to Your sayings.”

St. Gregory's theological knowledge and poetic style shine through in several excerpts from his works. In the liturgy, he extols the ineffable power of God's wisdom and the immeasurable depth of His love for humanity. He acknowledges that God, as a Lover of Mankind, created him as a man, not out of necessity but out of His tender mercies. St. Gregory marvels at God's creation, acknowledging that He has provided a roof (heaven) and a foundation (earth) for him to dwell upon, leaving him in need of nothing.

“Ineffable is the power of Your wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love toward mankind. You, as Lover of Mankind, have created me, as man. You had no need of my servitude, but rather I had need of Your lordship. Because of the multitude of Your tender mercies, You have brought me into existence when I was not. You have raised heaven as a roof for me, and established the earth for me to walk upon...You have not left me in need of any of the works of Your honor.”

Furthermore, St. Gregory emphasizes God's transformative power, stating that He has turned punishment into salvation for him, underscoring the depth of God's love and sacrifice: “You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation ... For my sake, O my Master, You have not hidden Your face from the shame of spitting.”

Similarly another excerpt, St. Gregory draws a parallel between Christ's journey to the Cross and the sacrifice of a lamb, highlighting Christ's willingness to endure suffering for the sake of humanity. “You have come to the slaughter as a sheep, even to the Cross.” Accordingly, all these meditations lead us to surrender to Him, and thus, he proclaims: “I offer You, O my Master, the symbols of my freedom. I write my works according to Your sayings.”

These excerpts illustrate St. Gregory's deep theological understanding and his ability to express it in a poetic and eloquent manner, demonstrating his reverence for God and his profound appreciation for His grace and mercy. His writings continue to inspire and uplift, offering insights into the beauty of God's love and the transformative power of faith.

Writings

St. Gregory's preserved works encompass a collection of sermons, appropriately termed orations, as well as an extensive array of letters. These writings provide valuable insights into his theological thought, his personal life, and his interactions with contemporaries. His writings also include a lengthy autobiographical poem, commonly known as "Carmen de se ipso" or "Song Concerning One-self," along with numerous shorter poems, primarily focused on religious themes.

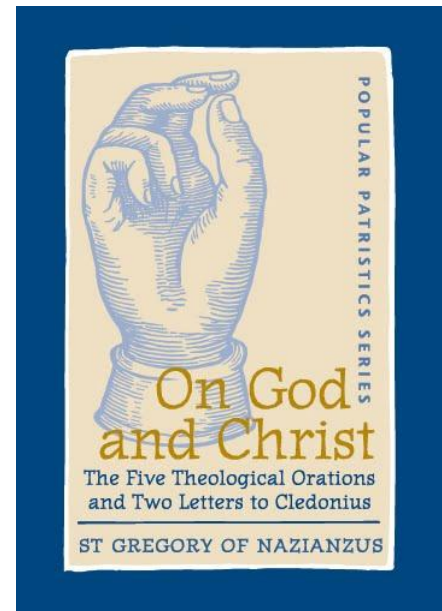
St. Gregory's body of work, known as the "Gregorian corpus," encompasses a rich and multifaceted collection of texts that provide invaluable insights into his theological thought, personal life, and interactions with his contemporaries. At the core of his preserved works are a series of sermons, aptly named orations. These masterful discourses, numbering around forty-five, cover a wide range of topics, from spirituality and morality to historical events and ecclesiastical affairs.

	Type	Description
45 Orations	De Fuga (Oration 2)	Justifying his flight from priesthood.
	Orations of Individuals	For Athanasius, Basil, Georgine, etc.
	5 Theological Orations (Orations 27 to 31)	Gregory's most significant theological contributions arose from his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.
	Festal Orations (1,38,39,40,41,45)	Pascha, Nativity, Theophany, Baptism, Pentecost, another on Pascha.
~250+ Letters/Epistles		The letters offer a glimpse into his personal life, his relationships with other individuals, and the challenges he faced as a bishop
Autobiography		nearly 2,000 lines (commonly referred to as Carmen de se ipso, "Song Concerning One-self")
100 other shorter poems		These poems, which number around 100, showcase St. Gregory's poetic skills and his ability to express theological concepts in a creative and lyrical manner.

The Five Theological Orations

Among the orations, St. Gregory's defense of the doctrine of the Trinity stands out as one of his most significant theological contributions. His profound understanding of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is evident in his detailed arguments and eloquent language. He is particularly noted for his contributions to the field of pneumatology, which focuses on understanding the nature and role of the Holy Spirit.

In the bustling city of Constantinople in the year 380 AD, St. Gregory of Nazianzus delivered a series of five sermons, known as the "Theological Orations" or "Orationes Theologicae." These influential discourses served as a steadfast defense of Trinitarian theology, fervently opposing the heretical teachings of Arianism, Eunomianism, and Apollinarianism.



The Theological Orations, numbered 27 to 31, each address a specific aspect of the Trinity.

Oration	Topic	Key Points
27	The Character of a Theologian	Outlines the virtues and qualifications required to engage in theological discourse.
28	God the Father	Explores the concept of the uncreated and eternal being, the source and origin of all creation.
29	God the Son	Presents philosophical arguments in support of the divine nature of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the unity and equality of the Son with the Father.
30	Challenging Passages from Scripture	Provides exegetical insights, clarifying the meaning of these texts and defending the orthodox understanding of the Son's deity.
31	God the Holy Spirit	Emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a distinct person within the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son.

In the 1st of five sermons, Oration 27, Saint Gregory first of all defines the characteristics of a theologian, and who may theologize, thus setting stage for proper refutation. Only those who are

experienced can properly reason about God, those who are successful at contemplation and, most importantly, who are pure in soul and body, and utterly selfless. He is clearly calling for holiness as a prerequisite for discussing theology. It is not meant to just have random and meaningless debates and dialogues, but it is fully in respect to our pursuit of love of God. We must first approach it with humility and respect. It is like St. Paul when he says: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.” 1 Cor 3:1-4

To reason about God properly is possible only for one who enters into it with fervor and reverence. It is also critical to know the ineffability of God, that is, to discuss only aspects within our grasp.

*“Discussion of theology is not for everyone, I tell you, not for everyone—it is no such inexpensive or effortless pursuit. Nor, I would add, is it for every occasion, or every audience; neither are all its aspects open to inquiry. It must be reserved for certain occasions, for certain audiences, and certain limits must be observed. **It is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul.** For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun’s brightness.”*

In Oration 28, St. Gregory the Theologian delves into Scriptural passages that describe the nature of God. One such passage states that "God fills heaven and earth" (paragraph 8). While our minds may interpret this as God physically occupying space, St. Gregory reminds us that God is immaterial and transcends physical dimensions. Therefore, these biblical passages serve as mental tools to help us comprehend God's incomprehensible essence. Human language falls short in describing God, but we must attempt to do so nonetheless. St. Gregory emphasizes that God has concealed His true essence from humanity. Furthermore, he asserts that individuals bound by physical bodies cannot perceive abstract concepts without incorporating corporeal elements.

“He can only be *incorporeal*. But the term “incorporeal,” though granted, does not give an all-embracing revelation of God’s essential being. The same is true of “ingenerate,” “unoriginate,” “immutable,” and “immortal,” indeed of all attributes applied, or referred, to God...The point of this is that comprehension of the object of knowledge should be effected **both by negation of what the thing is not and also by positive assertion** of what it is.”

To understand God, St. Gregory suggests we use two approaches:

1. **Cataphatic Theology (Positive Theology)**

- Describes the attributes of God, such as His love, wisdom, and power.
- It helps us understand what God is like by describing His qualities.

2. **Apophatic Theology (Negative Theology)**

- Describes what God is not, rather than what He is.
- It emphasizes that God is beyond our limited human understanding and language. We can't fully describe or comprehend Him.

St. Gregory believes that combining these approaches is essential because God's nature is infinite and incomprehensible. Using both positive and negative theology helps us appreciate the greatness and mystery of God.

In the third and fourth theological orations, Oration 29 and 30, is dedicated to God the Son. St. Gregory addresses 10 Arian Philosophical arguments for the creation of the Son. He presents philosophical arguments in support of the divine nature of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the unity and equality of the Son with the Father. For example, in the following excerpt, he addresses the eternal characteristic of the Son and the relation between God and the Logos.

So when did these last two originate? They transcend “whenness,” but if I must give a naive answer—when the Father did. When was that? There has not been a “when” when the Father has not been in existence. This, then, is true of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Put another question and I will answer it. Since when has the Son been begotten? Since as long as the Father has not been begotten.

Can anyone be a “father,” without beginning to be one? Yes, one who did not begin his existence. What begins to exist begins to be a father. He did not later begin to be Father—he did not begin at all. He is “Father” in the true sense, because he is not a son as well. Just as the Son is “Son” in the true sense, because he is not a father as well.

Finally, in Oration 31, he turns his attention to God the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a distinct person within the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. He argues against the Apollinarian heresy, which denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ. He is the first to use the idea of procession to describe the relationship between the Spirit and the Godhead.

“The Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father.”²⁵ Insofar as he proceeds from the Father, he is no creature; inasmuch as he is not begotten, he is no Son; and to the extent that procession is the mean between ingeneracy and generacy, he is God.” (P8)

While St. Gregory did not fully develop upon the concept, the idea of procession would significantly impact subsequent thinking about the Holy Spirit. He additionally declared the eternality of the Holy Spirit, noting that His actions were somewhat obscure in the Old Testament but became much more evident after Jesus' ascension into Heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit during the feast of Pentecost.

Staying humble

In his Concluding Oration 31, St. Gregory addresses crucial theological concepts to safeguard the distinctness of the three hypostases (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and warns against mischievous theological deviations that could lead to the erroneous division of the three hypostases: “The aim is to safeguard the distinctness of the three hypostases within the single nature and quality of the Godhead. The Son is not Father; there is one Father, yet he is whatever the Father is. The Spirit is not Son because he is from God; there is one Only-begotten. Yet whatever the Son is, he is. The three are a single whole in their Godhead and the single whole is three in personalities. Thus there will be no Sabellian “One,” no three to be mischievously divided by our contemporaries.”

St. Gregory associates mischievousness with theological error because it involves attributing more significance to human words and opinions than to the divine revelations expressed in Scripture. This reminds us to be cautious against elevating personal interpretations above God's teachings, as this undermines the authority of divine truth.

Furthermore, this stresses the importance of vigilance and correctability for those who engage in theological discussions. A teacher of theological matters should be open to correction and should not merely express personal opinions. Theology, as a discipline, is not suitable for everyone, and it is crucial for individuals, particularly servants, to discern whether they possess the necessary aptitude and commitment to engage in theological discourse. It is to be noted that all lessons, to some degree, have theological matters and that the purpose of preparatory programs is to precisely alleviate such mischievousness.



Review Questions

1. What is the main topic that St. Gregory discussed? (A: the Holy Trinity.)
2. St. Gregory was the Archbishop of _____. (A: Constantinople.)
3. Along with St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory is also known as one of the _____ Fathers. (A: Cappadocian.)
4. How did St. Gregory come to know Christ in his lifetime? (A: As he was sailing from Alexandria to Athens, a sea storm threatened his life and salvation, since he had not yet been baptized. With tears he cried to God to spare him, and vowed to dedicate his whole life to Him, then the storm ceased.)
5. St. Gregory has ____ famous sermons, which discuss the characteristics of a _____, and who may theologize. (A: 5, theologian.)

2.2 *Fathers of the East and West*

Writings of St. Ignatius

PATRISTICS

Who was St. Ignatius?

St. Ignatius was known as a friend of St. Polycarp and, along with him, were disciples of St. John the Beloved. He traveled with St. John and the Apostles consecrated him bishop for Antioch. He nicknamed himself Theophorus “the God-bearing”. When Trajan asked him about his faith and ordered he be taken to Rome to be thrown to wild beasts in the Colosseum.

St. Ignatius, a revered figure in early Christianity, served as the Bishop of Antioch from around 70 AD until his martyrdom in 107 AD. His life unfolded during the reign of Emperor Trajan, a time marked by both challenges and opportunities for the Christian faith.

According to the church traditions, Ignatius is believed to be the young boy mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18, verses 2-5. “Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:2-5). In this passage, Jesus calls a little child to Him, emphasizing the importance of childlike humility and faith for entering the kingdom of heaven. If Ignatius was indeed this young boy, his early encounter with Jesus evidently significantly shaped his spiritual journey.

St. Ignatius was known for his close friendship with St. Polycarp, and together they were disciples of St. John the Beloved, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. St. Ignatius traveled alongside St. John, and it was under the apostles' guidance that he was consecrated as the Bishop of Antioch. During his time as Bishop, Ignatius earned the nickname "Theophorus," meaning "the God-bearer." This title reflected his profound devotion to God and his unwavering commitment to spreading the Christian message. He believed that carrying God within his heart and soul was the greatest privilege and responsibility.

En Route to Rome, for Martyrdom

St. Ignatius's life was not without trials. When Emperor Trajan questioned him about his faith, Ignatius remained steadfast in his beliefs. As a result, Trajan ordered that Ignatius be taken to Rome, where he would face a cruel fate. He was sentenced to be thrown to wild beasts in the Colosseum, a gruesome spectacle intended to intimidate and deter Christians from their faith.

Christians, at the time, were not killed because they practiced Christianity, they were martyred because they refused to also practice Roman religion. While practicing Christianity alone was not the sole reason for their persecution, the primary factor was their steadfast resistance to incorporating Roman religious rituals into their beliefs and practices.

During the 1st and 2nd centuries, persecutions were generally localized and sporadic, occurring in specific regions or cities. However, several factors contributed to increased persecution during particularly stressful times. One of the primary reasons for this escalation was jealousy and resentment from neighbors and local communities. Christians were often seen as outsiders who challenged traditional beliefs and practices, leading to social tensions and conflicts. During times of political instability, economic hardship, or natural disasters, the Roman authorities and populace often viewed Christians as scapegoats for the Empire's problems. This scapegoating mentality led to intensified persecutions, with Christians being blamed for various societal ills and misfortunes.

In ancient Rome, blood sports were a popular form of entertainment. Gladiators, the sports stars of their time, played a crucial role in these events. The criminal and slave trade significantly influenced the success of circuses, providing a steady stream of participants for the bloody spectacles. The Colosseum, an iconic amphitheater of the Roman world, could accommodate up to 60,000 spectators. In contrast, the Circus Maximus, a vast chariot racing venue, had a capacity of 250,000. A typical day at these venues would start with animal fights in the morning, followed by the execution of criminals during lunch. The highlight of the day came in the afternoon, where gladiators engaged in intense combat, captivating the audience with their skills and bravery.

Despite the impending danger, St. Ignatius embraced his martyrdom with courage and grace. He viewed it as an opportunity to glorify God and demonstrate the unwavering strength of Christian faith. As he traveled to Rome under the guard of Roman soldiers, Ignatius met Christians along the way and wrote 7 Epistles: To the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans

and to St. Polycarp. The letters to various churches and individuals, expressed his love, encouragement, and wisdom. These letters, known as the Ignatian Epistles, have become treasured spiritual texts, offering insights into early Christian theology and spirituality. Eusebius, a historian of the early church, wrote on St. Ignatius as one who proclaimed to hold on to the traditions of the church. Remember, he was martyred in 107 AD!

"The Report says that he [Ignatius] was sent from Syria to Rome, and became food for wild beasts on account of his testimony to Christ. And as he made the journey through Asia under the strictest military surveillance" (he *called* the guards "ten leopards" in his Letter to the Romans, 5: 1), "he fortified the parishes in the various cities where he stopped by homilies and exhortations, and warned them above all to be especially on their guard against the heresies that were then beginning to prevail, and **exhorted them to hold fast to the tradition of the Apostles**".

St. Ignatius's unwavering faith and heroic death in the Colosseum left an enduring legacy. He became a symbol of Christian perseverance in the face of persecution, inspiring countless believers throughout history. His writings continue to be studied and cherished, providing valuable guidance and inspiration to those seeking a deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

Importance of Antioch

Antioch, a city of great significance in the history of Christianity, holds a unique distinction as one of the only cities to have been evangelized by both Saint Peter and Saint Paul. It was here, in the bustling streets and vibrant markets, that the followers of Jesus Christ, then known as "the Way," were first referred to as "Christians." This momentous event is recorded in the book of Acts in the New Testament (Acts 11:26).

Antioch's Christian heritage is deeply rooted in the presence of Saint Peter, who served as its first bishop. Saint Peter, one of the most prominent apostles of Jesus, played a pivotal role in the establishment and growth of the early Church. His leadership and teachings in Antioch helped shape the beliefs and practices of the fledgling Christian community.

Following Rome and Alexandria, Antioch emerged as a significant and influential center of Christianity during the 2nd through 4th centuries. With a bustling port and a diverse population, Antioch became a melting pot of cultures and ideas. Christian scholars, philosophers, and theologians gathered in Antioch, engaging in lively dialogues and discussions that contributed to the theological development of Christianity.

Today, Antioch, known as Antakya in modern-day Turkey, continues to hold its place as a significant site of Christian pilgrimage and historical exploration. The city's rich tapestry of Christian history, from the footsteps of Saint Peter and Saint Paul to the emergence of the term "Christian," serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of the early Church and its profound impact on the shaping of Christianity.

Goal of His Epistles

St. Ignatius of Antioch addressed several key issues in his writings. These issues shed light on the challenges and concerns facing the early church, and provide valuable insights into the development of Christian thought and practice.

Martyrdom

St. Ignatius placed a high value on martyrdom and saw it as the ultimate act of faith and love for Christ. In his letters to various churches, he encouraged believers to embrace martyrdom if necessary, emphasizing that it was a way of imitating Christ's sacrifice and achieving eternal glory. St. Ignatius himself was martyred in Rome around 107 AD, and his writings reflect his readiness to face death for the sake of his faith.

Early Heresies

St. Ignatius confronted several heretical teachings that threatened the unity and purity of the early church. Among them were Docetism and Judaizers. Docetism, a Gnostic heresy, denied the physical reality of Jesus's incarnation, claiming that he only appeared to be human. He refuted this heresy, asserting that Christ genuinely suffered, died, and rose from the dead in a physical body.

Judaizers, on the other hand, insisted on the necessity of observing Jewish laws and rituals for salvation. Ignatius argued against Judaizers, who did not accept the authority of the New Testament, emphasizing that salvation came through faith in Christ alone and that the Mosaic Law had been fulfilled in him.

Church Structures

St. Ignatius played a crucial role in shaping the structure and organization of the early church. His letters reveal his emphasis on episcopal authority and the importance of a hierarchical structure. He believed that each church should be led by a bishop,

assisted by presbyters (elders) and deacons. Ignatius stressed the need for unity and obedience within the church and urged believers to submit to their leaders. He also emphasized the significance of the Eucharist as a central act of worship and a symbol of the unity of the church.

With unwavering conviction, St. Ignatius affirmed that the New Testament represented the completion of the Old Testament and emphasized the genuine humanity of Christ. He viewed Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection as pivotal events ensuring "eternal life" in the resurrected Christ. If Christ's death was merely an illusion, St. Ignatius held that his own suffering and willingness to sacrifice his life for Christ would be rendered meaningless.

These key issues in St. Ignatius's writings provide a valuable glimpse into the challenges and triumphs of the early church. His focus on martyrdom, his opposition to heresies, and his contributions to church structures helped shape the development of Christianity and continue to influence Christian thought and practice today.

Importance of Structure and Hierarchy

According to St. Ignatius of Antioch, a prominent early church father, the bishop holds a crucial role within the church. He represents to his local community the one true bishop, Christ himself. This representation extends beyond mere symbolism; it signifies a profound spiritual connection. Union with the bishop, both in terms of belief and worship, symbolizes union with Christ.

St. Ignatius firmly believed that those who break away from the bishop in a spirit of pride and arrogance sever this sacred union. He viewed such actions as a detrimental disruption of the church's unity. For St. Ignatius, the unity of the church, with its hierarchical structure, was not merely a practical arrangement but a concrete manifestation of the future life in Christ, which would be fully realized in heaven.

While St. Ignatius acknowledged the importance of authority within the church, his primary focus was not on institutional discipline. Instead, he emphasized the spiritual significance of the bishop's role as a representative of Christ and the importance of unity among believers. He believed that by aligning themselves with the bishop and participating in the church's worship, individuals

could deepen their connection with Christ and experience a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom on earth.

"It is fitting that you should concur with the will of your Bishop, which you also do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the Bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore, in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And man by man, you become a choir, that being harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison you may with one voice sing to the Father..." – St. Ignatius's epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesus 4:1-2).

St. Ignatius placed great emphasis on the significance of unity within the church, drawing parallels between the Triune nature of God and the oneness of the Christian community. He believed that God's essence is unity, and that true unity can only be found in God. His teachings on unity were rooted in his understanding of the Trinity. He believed that God exists as three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—yet these three persons are inseparably united in one God. This unity of the Trinity, he argued, is a model for the unity that should exist within the church. "Be one, one supplication, one mind, one hope in love.... Therefore, all run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar, as to one Jesus Christ who came forth from one Father, and is with and has gone to one" – Epistle to the Magnesians (7: 1-2).

Seeing the church as a reflection of the Trinity, with Jesus Christ as the head and the members of the church as his body, he believed that unity within the church is essential for the church to fulfill its mission of proclaiming the gospel and bringing people to salvation. When the church is united, it can more effectively witness to the love of God and the reconciling power of the cross. "Let no man do anything connected with Church without the Bishop" (to the church of Smyrna)

St. Ignatius' emphasis on unity extended beyond the local church. He believed that all Christian communities should be united in faith and love, regardless of their geographic location or cultural background. For the first time in Christian literature, he employed the expression "catholic church." This term, derived from the Greek word "katholikos," signifying "universal" or "whole," captured the essence of the church as one unified entity. It transcended geographical boundaries, encompassing all Christian congregations worldwide.

According to St. Ignatius, the catholic church was not merely an abstract idea but a tangible reality experienced in the present. He viewed the church's unity, including its structure and organization, as a concrete manifestation of the future life in Christ. For him, the church on earth mirrored the heavenly kingdom, embodying the ultimate goal of unity and harmony among believers.

His writings and teachings laid the foundation for future discussions and developments in ecclesiology, influencing subsequent generations of theologians and church leaders. The idea of the catholic church as a universal and unified entity remains a central tenet of Christian faith and practice to this day.

Martyrdom As Union With Christ

St. Ignatius's intense desire to become a martyr is deeply intertwined with his profound understanding of union with Christ. For Ignatius, being a true disciple of Christ signifies emulating Christ's path of suffering and sacrifice, as expressed in his Passion. He believed that only through sharing in Christ's suffering could one truly imitate him and achieve spiritual perfection.

Throughout his letters, St. Ignatius frequently expressed his sense of imperfection due to not yet having endured the ultimate test of martyrdom. His journey to Rome marked a significant turning point, as he felt he was finally beginning to live as a true disciple. However, he harbored a profound fear that his friends in Rome might intervene and secure a pardon for him, thereby depriving him of the opportunity to achieve perfection through martyrdom.

Ignatius's ardent desire for martyrdom stemmed from his unwavering conviction that only by uniting himself with Christ's Passion could he partake in Christ's ultimate glory. Yet, despite his convictions, he was not immune to human fears. He recognized the possibility that he might falter in the face of death and humbly requested the prayers of the churches to bolster his strength and constancy.

“I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Allow me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God]. I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man: they were free, while I am, even until now, a servant. But when I suffer, I shall be the

freed-man of Jesus, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.” (to the Romans)

St. Ignatius's unwavering commitment to martyrdom serves as a testament to his deep faith and his willingness to follow in the footsteps of Christ. His understanding of union with Christ transcended mere intellectual assent; it manifested itself in his fervent longing to share in Christ's suffering and experience the fullness of his glory. His unwavering pursuit of perfection through martyrdom continues to inspire believers to strive for a deeper relationship with Christ and to embrace the path of self-sacrifice and service.

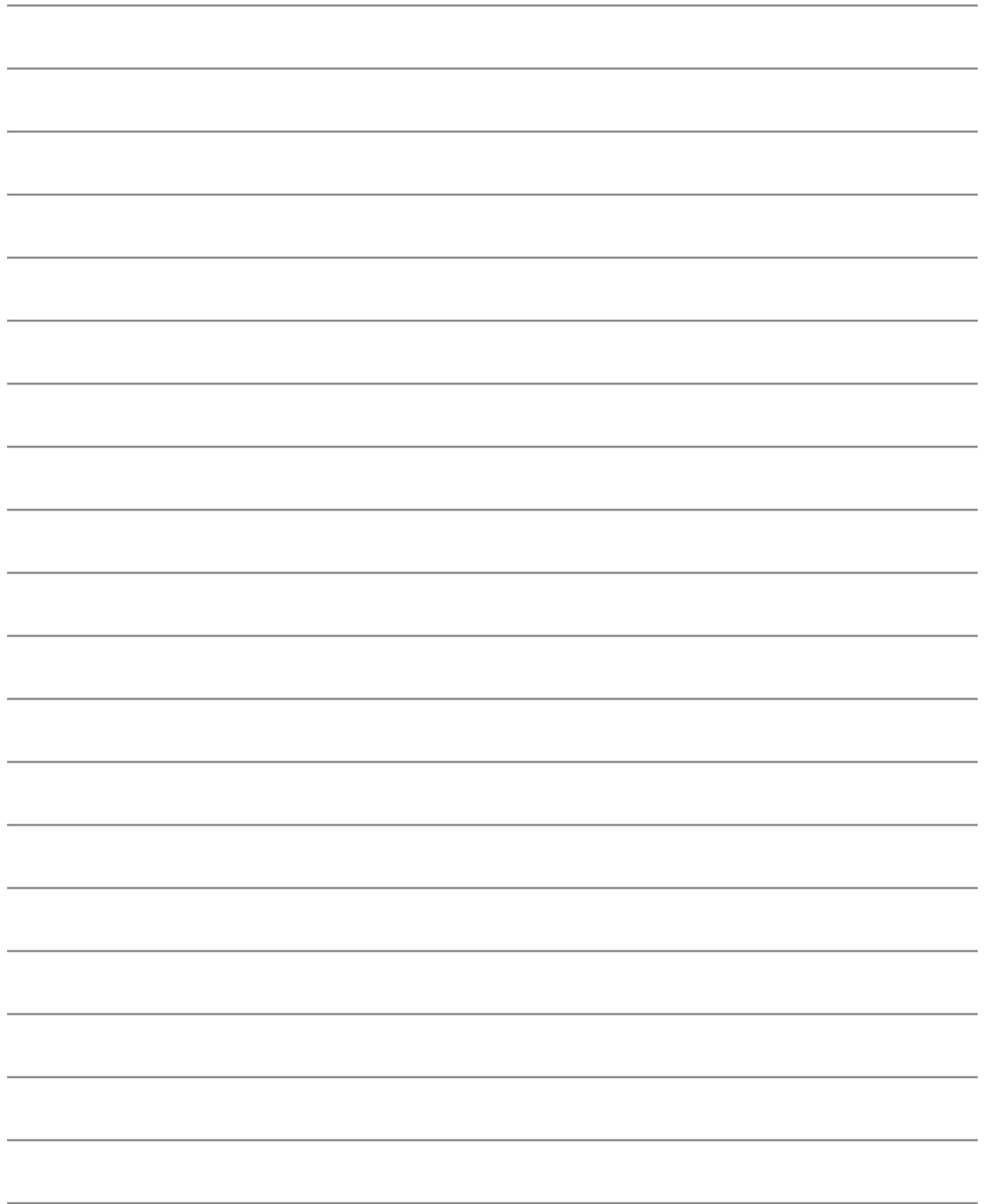
“For it is not my desire to act towards you as a man-pleaser, but as pleasing God, even as also you please Him. For neither shall I ever have such [another] opportunity of attaining to God; nor will you, if you shall now be silent, ever be entitled to the honor of a better work. For if you are silent concerning me, I shall become God's; but if you show your love to my flesh, I shall again have to run my race. Pray, then, do not seek to confer any greater favor upon me than that I be sacrificed to God while the altar is still prepared; that, being gathered together in love, you may sing praise to the Father, through Christ Jesus, that God has deemed me, the bishop of Syria, worthy to be sent for from the east unto the west. It is good to set from the world unto God, that I may rise again to Him.” (to the Romans)



Review Questions

1. St. Polycarp and St. Ignatius were disciples of St. John the Beloved. True or False? (A: True)
2. What did St. Ignatius nickname himself as? (A: Theophorus “the God-bearing”)
3. Why was St. Ignatius wanting to be martyred? (A: His love of martyrdom ultimately springs from a deep conviction that only by union with Christ's Passion will he participate in Christ's glory.)
4. What were the teachings of the Judaizers? (A: People who did not accept the authority of the New Testament.)
5. What were the teachings of the Docetists? (A: People who held that Christ's sufferings and death were apparent but not real.)

 <i>Books</i>	 <i>Supplementary Material</i>
 <u>St. Ignatius of Antioch: The Epistles</u>	<u>Saint Ignatius of Antioch Biography, Writings, & Martyrdom Britannica</u>
 <u>Bearing God: The Life and Works of St. Ignatius of Antioch the God-Bearer</u>	



2.2 *Fathers of the East and West*

St. Cyril On The Incarnation

PATRISTICS

Christology and Us

Christology is part of theology that is concerned with the nature and work of Jesus, including such matters as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and His human and divine nature and their relationship. Christology is the study of Christ and His purpose. Studying His person is crucial as it provides us with the understanding of who He (God) is. This proper understanding clarifies a major scope of the purpose of us being here. We will develop on this later and the impact of different Christological arguments and their implications.

Christ is not His last name. Rather, it is a Greek term χριστός (chrīstós) meaning “Messiah”. Just the usage of the name of Jesus Christ makes the entirety of the difference. Christ means Messiah. Thus by simply using His name of Jesus Christ, you are proclaiming a faith, an understanding of who He is and His relation to you.

Some Heresies on the Hypostasis of the Son are against His Person - Eionism / Adoptionism: Christ was a man, merely a human being and God adopted him (Islamic) Manicheanism / Paulicianism: Similar to Eionism.

Another Heresy was against the Son Divinity - Arianism: Denied the Divinity of Christ Semi-Arians: Son is like the Father or a fan of the Father – a creation of the Father Anomoeanism: Extreme Arianism.

Against His humanity - Eutychianism / Monophysitism: Divinity absorbed humanity Gnosticism: Denied His Humanity Docetism: Did not take a real body: Ghost like – no incarnation Marcionism/Valentianism: God of OT is separate & inferior than Christ the Saviour. Against His nature - Nestorianism: Split the Divinity and Humanity Apollinarism: Christ was not in need of soul and spirit Pelagianism: Based on Work, not on grace of God Semi-Pelagianism: Giving more weight to action which defies “without God you cannot do anything”

Definition of “The One Nature” Between Two Extremes

Eutyches: “I confess that our Lord had two natures before they were united, but I confess that after the union He had one nature” Nestorius: [Jesus was a] “God-bearer”. St. Cyril’s definition : “The One Nature of the Incarnate Logos”

St. Severus’s definition of Eutyches - “When we say ‘one incarnate nature of God the Word’, as Athanasius the proponent of the truth and the apostolic faith said in the books on the Incarnation of the Word, we use ‘nature’ in place of ‘individual designation’, denoting the one hypostasis of the Word himself, like that of Peter also or of Paul, or of any other single man. Wherefore also, when we say ‘one nature which became incarnate’, we do not say it absolutely, but by adding one nature of the Word Himself clearly denote the one hypostasis.” St. Severus – Letter 65 to Eupraxias (Oriental Orthodox Library, P.117)

St. Cyril’s definition of Eutyches - “The union was “at the level of concrete existence,” meaning by this simply that the Word’s nature, that is, his concrete existence, which is the Word Himself, was genuinely united to a human nature, quite apart from any change or confusion, as we have said often enough. He is reckoned to be, and actually is, a single Christ; the same individual is both God and man.” St. Cyril of Alexandria. [Three Christological Treatises](#): 1. One Nature is not a mixture of the two natures into one new nature, 2. One Nature is not a union of two persons, 3. One Nature is one hypostasis = One Person out of two natures.

Implication on the Sayings and Actions of the Lord - “On the one hand, some of the sayings are very especially proper to His divinity. Others again are proper to His humanity. But others very specially pertain to a certain middle position, because they reveal the Son as God and man, both at the same time and in Him. Yet we say that those proper to His divinity and those proper to His humanity are the sayings of the one Son.” Cyril of Alexandria. [Letters, 1–50](#).

‘So far, then, as the question of the manner of the Only-Begotten’s becoming man appears for purely mental consideration by the mind’s eye, our view is that there are two united natures but one Christ, Son and Lord, the Word of God become man and incarnate.’ - St Cyril of Alexandria. “First Letter to Succensus”

Do not, therefore, divide in these instances the expressions about the Lord, for they have in the same person what is proper to God and what is proper to His humanity; but rather apply them to the one Son, that is, to God the Word made flesh.

Definition of The One Nature - The Difference between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox - The Sixth Ecumenical Council and the Tome of Leo

The sixth Ecumenical Council – The Definition of Faith - “Following the five Holy Ecumenical Councils and the Holy and approved Fathers, with one voice defining: [...] One and the same Christ our Lord the Only-Begotten Son of two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, inseparably, indivisibly to be recognized, the peculiarities of neither nature being lost by the union but rather the proprieties of each nature being preserved, concurring in one Person and in one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Only-Begotten Son of God, the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. [...]

Liturgy of St. Basil/St. Gregory/St. Cyril “He made it one with His divinity, without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration.”

We glorify two natural operations indivisibly, immutably, inconfusedly, inseparably in the same our Lord Jesus Christ our true God. That is to say a divine operation and a human operation according to the divine preacher Leo, who most distinctly asserts as follows: “For each form does in communion with the other what pertains properly to it, the Word, namely, doing that which pertains to the Word, and the flesh that which pertains to the flesh.” For we will not admit one natural operation in God and in the creature, as we will not exalt into the divine essence what is created, nor will we bring down the glory of the divine nature to the place suited to the creature. [...]

His two natures shone forth in His one subsistence in which He both performed the miracles and endured the sufferings through the whole of His economic conversation, [...] for although joined together yet each nature wills and does the things proper to it and that indivisibly and inconfusedly.”
[The Third Council of Constantinople: The Definition of Faith.](#)

“For neither do His Divine acts affect His human, nor His human acts His Divine, since both concur in this way and to this very end that in their operation His twofold qualities be not absorbed the one by the other, nor His individuality doubled.” Leo the Great. [Letters](#)

Exchange of Properties

St. Severus' Objection to the Tome of Leo

“We therefore anathematize [...] those who separate the properties, and apportion them to each nature apart. When the one Christ has once been divided (and He is divided by the fact that they speak of two natures after the union), separated into a distinct diversity go the operations and properties which are the offspring of this division, as the words of Leo's impious letter state in what he said: ‘For each of the forms effects in partnership with the other that which belongs to itself, the Word doing that which belongs to the Word, and the body performing the things which belong to the body.’ St. Severus of Antioch – Letter 1 to Oecumenius (Oriental Orthodox Library, P.17-19)

“Again the Tome of Leo says: ‘For each of the natures preserves its own property without diminution.’ Distributing the properties to the two severally as one who divides the one and only Christ into two natures.” St. Severus – Letter 1 to Oecumenius (Oriental Orthodox Library, P.17-19)

‘So far, then, as the question of the manner of the Only-Begotten's becoming man appears for purely mental consideration by the mind's eye, our view is that there are two united natures but one Christ, Son and Lord, the Word of God become man and incarnate.’

St. Cyril and the Analogy of Iron and Fire

“Against these things it is well to set the much-honored words of the holy Cyril: ‘For, as fire when it takes hold of wood and is introduced into it, prevails over it, and does not make it cease being wood, but rather changes it into the appearance and force of fire, and performs all its own acts in it, and is already reckoned as one with it, so understand in the case of Christ also. For, since God was ineffably united with manhood, He has preserved it as what we say it is, and He Himself also has remained what he was. But, after He has once been united, He is reckoned as one with it, appropriating its qualities to Himself, but He Himself also carried on the operation of His nature in it.’” St. Severus of Antioch – Letter 1 to Oecumenius (Oriental Orthodox Library, P.17-19)

The Use of the Word “Mingling”

Liturgy of St. Basil/St. Gregory/St. Cyril “He made it one with His divinity, without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration.” “The things of His humanity are to be placed with His divinity because of His commingling. For it was not a heavenly man who came down from heaven but

rather God who was mingled with man. And the Lord of glory, who was God, could not be crucified unless He received a body.” Cyril of Alexandria. Letters, 51–110.

“Mingling” – Not Like Liquids

“For the name mixture, some of the holy fathers too have put: but since you say that you are afraid lest any confusion be deemed to take place, as in the case of liquids mingled with one another, I rid you from your fears, for not so did they deem (how could they?) but they used the word improperly, anxious to declare the extreme union of the things that had come together.” Cyril of Alexandria. Five Tomes against Nestorius; Scholia on the Incarnation; Christ Is One; Fragments against Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Synousiasts

‘But if the two natures have been brought into one mingling, because they happen to be of different substances, neither one is preserved, but both have disappeared after they have been blended.’ - Cyril of Alexandria. (1987). Letters

Without Confusion

“to assert instead that the union was “at the level of concrete existence,” meaning by this simply that the Word’s nature, that is, His concrete existence, which is the Word himself, was genuinely united to a human nature, quite apart from any change or confusion, as we have said often enough. He is reckoned to be, and actually is, a single Christ; the same individual is both God and man.” St. Cyril of Alexandria, Three Christological Treatises

Other Analogies The Sun and the Mud

“The sun itself, when it casts its rays upon the very mud and mire, preserves its radiance quite unimpaired. And the divine, uncontaminated nature, which is above all else and which is quite incapable of suffering any of the things that normally cause distress: how could it be harmed by contact with what is lesser? Will it not rise above the nature that is inferior, and, by illuminating it with its own good things, transport it to what is incomparably better?” Cyril of Alexandria. Festal Letters, 13–30.

Other Analogies The Wool and the Dye

“Is it not totally obvious [...] that the saving union was the means by which he injected himself into our own way of life? And also so that by making the human soul His very own He might demonstrate that it was superior to sin, as if He had dyed it like a piece of wool with His own nature’s unshakeable immutability?” St. Cyril of Alexandria. Three Christological Treatises.

Other Analogies By St. Cyril and other Father

Wood and Fire, The Two Goats One Killed and the Other Let Go into the Wilderness, The Shepherd holding the Sheep on His Shoulders, The Lily of the Valleys and the Scent that it Emits, Golden Pot of Manna, Bread Dipped in Wine, The Vessel of Ointment and the Odour, Drop of Vinegar in the Ocean.

Why is Christology so Important? Partakers of the Divine Nature

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1:2–4

‘justly marvel at the incomparable mercy of the divine nature toward us, which graces those whom He has made with what belongs to Him and shares with His creatures what belongs to Himself alone.’ -Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Commentary on John (Vol. 2, p. 307).

‘But when He was led astray by the deception of the devil, He despised the creator. He trampled on the law that was marked out for Him and grieved His benefactor. The benefactor took back the grace that was given to Him. When, for the first time, the one who came to life heard, “Earth you are, and to earth you will return,” the likeness to God was then marked with a false stamp through the sin that rushed in, and the engraving was no longer distinct. It became more obscure in him, so to speak, and darkened by the transgression. When the human race reached a great multitude and sin ruled over all of them, it thoroughly plundered the soul of each one, and nature was stripped of the original grace. The Spirit also departed completely, and the rational creature fell into utter irrationality,

not even recognizing the creator Himself' Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Commentary on John. (Vol. 1, p. 81-2)

Review of Part 1: Christology & Grace

St. Paul prays that the grace may increase in our lives. Thus we will shortly ask ourselves, what is the meaning of grace increasing in our lives?

All gifts from God are a grace. Him taking on the human nature is a gift and thus a grace He gave all mankind. Grace is a gift that leads to salvation. Because, at the creation, we were abounding in grace, and through the fall of man, mankind was stripped of this original grace. Thus the incarnation of Christ, graces us with a new nature that leads us towards the path of salvation.

By Grace you have been saved through faith

Saint Paul clearly teaches: “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephsians 2:8). Grace is inseparable from salvation. How we understand grace will affect our understanding of salvation. The Orthodox Church teaches, as do the Holy Scriptures, that we are saved by grace through faith. The question is, “What is grace and how is it acquired (i.e. what is faith)?”

Partakers of Divine nature through the gifts of Grace

It is mentioned in John 1:16, “grace for grace”. The early church fathers teach us that there is a grace in the Old testament given to men through the law of Moses and is raised and upgraded to a new grace – a grace and truth through Jesus Christ. It is through Grace that we are partakers of the divine nature.

Similarly extracted from <https://www.suscopts.org/q&a/index.php?qid=718> - St. Athanasius says “When once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. God created man for incorruption and as an image of His own eternity; but by envy of the devil death entered into the world. When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adultery and thefts were

everywhere, murder and rapine filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both singly and in common.

God became man so that “For He became Man that we might be made good.” Athanasius of Alexandria. Athanasius: On the Incarnation of the Word of God. “In short, what is ours has become His in the economic appropriation, in order that we too, in what is peculiarly His, might ascend with Him and through Him, gaining that thing by the kindness that is from Him.” Cyril of Alexandria. Festal Letters, 13–30. “He took what is ours and gave us what is His.” Midnight Praises

That we may become partakers of His divine nature

‘The union with the vine of the branches that proceed from it belongs to the faculty of choice, and the vine’s union with us is relational. By a good choice, we have drawn near through faith and have become His offspring, receiving the honor of adoption from Him.’ Saint Cyril of Alexandria. (2015). Commentary on John. (D. Maxwell, Trans.) (Vol. 2, p. 210). Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press Academic.

‘those who are united to Him and fixed and rooted in Him, so to speak, who have come to share in His nature by participation in the Holy Spirit, are the branches. His Holy Spirit is what unites us to Christ our Savior.’ Saint Cyril of Alexandria. (2015). Commentary on John. (D. Maxwell, Trans.) (Vol. 2, p. 210). Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press Academic.

‘Paul expounds for us one true and general reason for the incarnation of the Only-Begotten when he says that God the Father was pleased “to recapitulate all things in Christ,” and that the term and the act of “recapitulation” refers to bringing back and taking up what had fallen into an unrecognizable end to what it was in the beginning. Saint Cyril of Alexandria. (2015). Commentary on John.

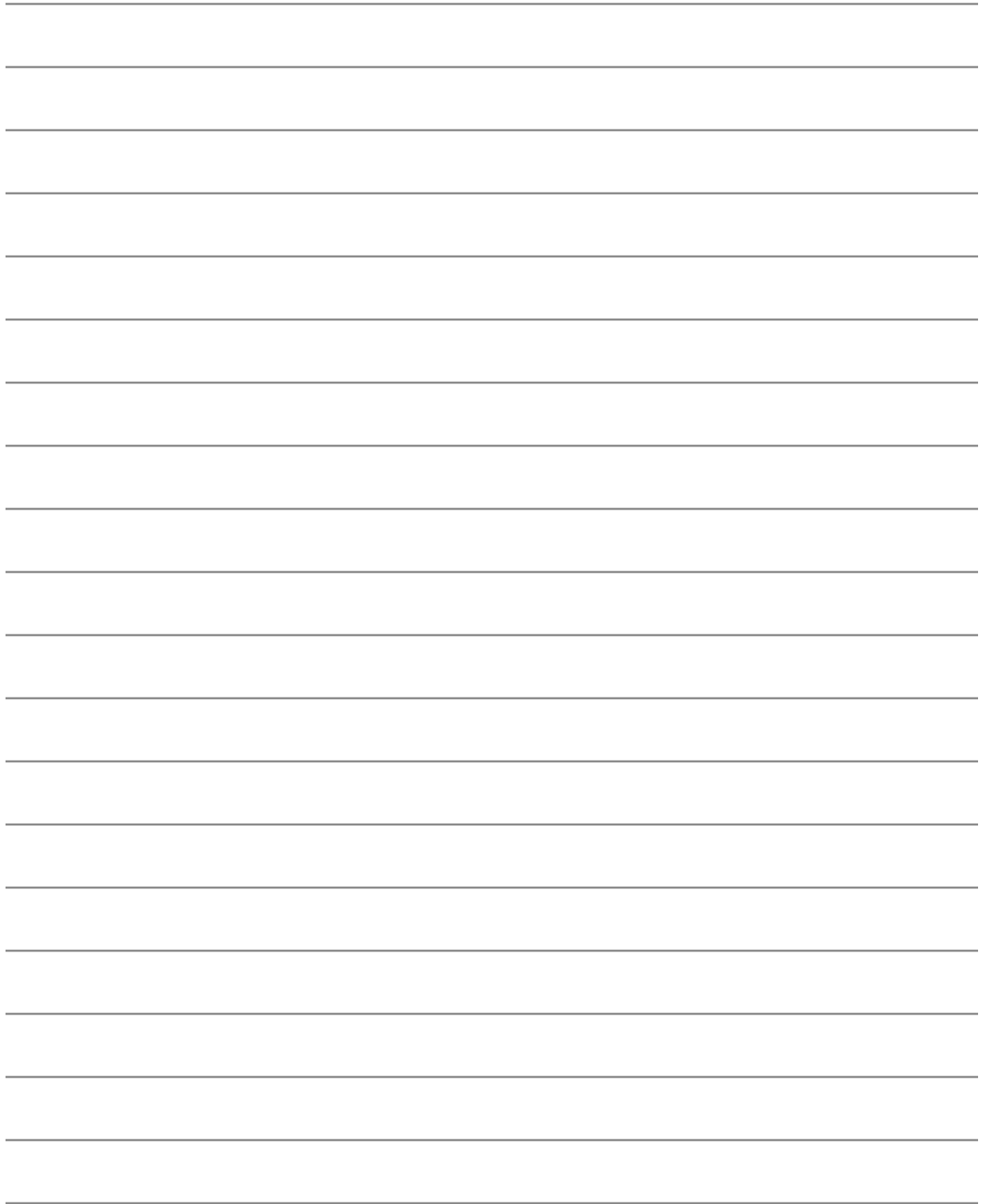
Conclusion

St. Cyril: “The One Nature of the Incarnate Logos” One Nature ≠ A mixture of the two natures into one new nature, One Nature ≠ A union of two persons, One Nature = One hypostasis = One Person out of two natures. There was no mixing/mingling of the natures in Christ but there was a mixing/mingling of the properties (ex: iron in the fire). All actions and sayings in the Gospels are attributed to the one Person of Jesus Christ and not to individual natures. His incarnation blesses us with the ability of being united with Him and restoring our image and likeness through grace. This is what St. Peter means when he says that we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4)



Review Questions

1. What is Christology? [Christology is part of theology that is concerned with the nature and work of Jesus, including such matters as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and His human and divine nature and their relationship.]
2. What are some of the heresies on the Hypostasis of Christ? [There was a heresies against His Person, against His Humanity, against His Divinity and against His Nature.]
3. What is One Nature? [One Hypostasis = One Person out of two natures.]
4. What is NOT One Nature? [A mixture of the two natures into one new nature. A union of two persons.]
5. What do we confess at every Holy Liturgy of St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. Cyril? [He made It One with His divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration.]
6. How did St. Cyril clarify the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ? [For it was not a heavenly man who came down from heaven but rather God who was mingled with man. And the Lord of glory, who was God, could not be crucified unless he received a body.]
7. What is Christology to grace? [All gifts from God are a grace. Christ taking on the human nature is a gift and thus a grace He gave all mankind. A gift that leads to salvation.]
8. What is grace to faith? [The Holy Scriptures teaches us, “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).]
9. Why is Christology so important? [As St Peter wrote we are “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue“ 2 Peter 1:3]



2.2 *Fathers of the East and West*

St. Augustine & St. Ambrose

PATRISTICS

St. Augustine the Philosopher

St. Augustine, a prominent figure in Christian history, was born in Tagaste, near Carthage, in 354 AD. His father, Patricius, adhered to pagan beliefs, while in stark contrast, his mother, St. Monica, was a devoted Christian. This juxtaposition of religious beliefs within his family played a significant role in shaping Augustine's spiritual journey.

At the tender age of 11, Augustine, accompanied by a group of friends, engaged in an act of theft. They ventured into a neighbor's garden and stole fruit, not driven by hunger, but solely because it was forbidden. This incident, as recounted in his autobiography, "The Confessions," became a pivotal moment in Augustine's understanding of human nature and the need for divine grace.

Reflecting on this act of theft, Augustine realized that he did not steal the fruit out of necessity or hunger. Instead, he was motivated by a perverse desire to transgress boundaries and defy societal norms, because "it was not permitted." He acknowledged that his nature was inherently flawed, tainted by a love for his own error rather than the object he erred for. "It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own error—not that for which I erred, but the error itself." This profound realization led Augustine to conclude that human beings possess a natural inclination toward sin and are in dire need of the transformative grace of Jesus Christ.

At the tender age of 17, he continued pursuing his studies of rhetoric, a subject that held a profound fascination for him. However, his family's financial situation was strained, making it challenging for them to support his educational endeavors. Despite these obstacles, he was determined to further his knowledge and skills in the art of persuasion and communication. Driven by an intense desire to fit in and be accepted by his peers, he embraced a hedonistic lifestyle. He indulged in extravagant parties, lavish entertainment, and sought out the company of those who shared his

taste for pleasure and excitement. He believed that by conforming to the social norms and expectations of his time, he could gain the approval and admiration he craved.

Nevertheless, deep down, he couldn't shake the feeling that his pursuit of superficial pleasures was ultimately unfulfilling. He longed for something more meaningful and substantial in his life. However, he struggled to reconcile his desire for acceptance with his inner yearning for purpose and authenticity. As he grappled with these internal conflicts, he found himself questioning the choices he was making and the direction his life was taking. The dissonance between his outward behavior and his true aspirations created a sense of unease within him, propelling him on a journey of self-discovery and reevaluation.

“woe is me! And dare I affirm that You held Your peace, O my God, while I strayed farther from You? Did You then hold Your peace to me? And whose words were they but Yours which by my mother, Your faithful handmaid, You poured into my ears, none of which sank into my heart to make me do it? For she desired, and I remember privately warned me, with great solicitude, not to commit fornication; but above all things never to defile another man's wife. These appeared to me but womanish counsels, which I should blush to obey. But they were Yours, and I knew it not, and I thought that You held Your peace, and that it was she who spoke, through whom You held not Your peace to me, and in her person was despised by me, her son, the son of Your handmaid, Your servant. But this I knew not; and rushed on headlong with such blindness, that among my equals I was ashamed to be less shameless, when I heard them pluming themselves upon their disgraceful acts, yea, and glorying all the more in proportion to the greatness of their baseness; and I took pleasure in doing it, not for the pleasure's sake only, but for the praise. What is worthy of despise but vice? But I made myself out worse than I was, in order that I might not be dispraised; and when in anything I had not sinned as the abandoned ones, I would affirm that I had done what I had not, that I might not appear abject for being more innocent, or of less esteem for being more chaste.” He had a thirst for knowledge, saying “I studied books of eloquence, wherein I was eager to be eminent from a damnable and inflated purpose, even a delight in human vanity.”

Due to his intake of erroneous information, he embraced Manichaeism, a religion that rigidly divides all things into inherently good or evil. Driven by a profound belief in the pursuit of knowledge, he embarked on a journey to establish a school in the heart of Rome in the year 383 AD. Rome, renowned for its vibrant intellectual scene, was believed to be the abode of the most skilled and brilliant rhetoricians of the era. The custom at this school was for students to pay their fees to the professor on the final day of the academic term. However, a regrettable pattern emerged: many

students diligently attended classes throughout the term, eagerly absorbing the wisdom imparted by their esteemed professor, only to vanish on the day of payment. This behavior left the professor in a precarious financial position, as he relied on these fees for his livelihood. “But I deceived her, when she violently restrained me either that she might retain me or accompany me, and I pretended that I had a friend whom I could not quit until he had a favorable wind to set sail. And I lied to my mother — and such a mother!— and got away.”

St. Augustine lived for 15 years out of wedlock, a period that he later reflected upon in his "Confessions." In this deeply personal text, St. Augustine delved into his emotions, motivations, and spiritual struggles during those years. He lived with his partner for 15 years, during which time they had a son named Adeodatus. He expressed deep remorse for his actions, recognizing that they deviated from the Christian principles he held dear. As a young scholar in Milan, St. Augustine had risen to the position of professor of rhetoric when his mother, St. Monica, convinced him to dismiss his unnamed mistress in pursuit of a high-society Milanese girl's hand in marriage. The arrangement required Augustine to remain celibate for two years, until the girl reached a marriageable age. However, his intense sexual desires hindered his ability to uphold his commitment. Soon after sending away the mother of his son, Adeodatus, he succumbed to temptation and took another mistress. St. Augustine described the turmoil within his soul, torn between his longing for spiritual fulfillment and his entanglement in earthly passions:

“Meanwhile my sins were being multiplied, and my mistress being torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, my heart, which clave to her, was racked, and wounded, and bleeding. And she went back to Africa, making a vow unto You never to know another man, leaving with me my natural son by her. But I, unhappy one, who could not imitate a woman, impatient of delay, since it was not until two years' time I was to obtain her I sought — being not so much a lover of marriage as a slave to lust — procured another, (not a wife, though,) that so by the bondage of a lasting habit the disease of my soul might be nursed up, and kept up in its vigour, or even increased, into the kingdom of marriage. Nor was that wound of mine as yet cured which had been caused by the separation from my former mistress, but after inflammation and most acute anguish it mortified, and the pain became numbed, but more desperate. (Confession 6:15)

Against the advice of his mother, who didn't want him to marry someone of a lower class, he was married to the woman for fifteen years, as well as had a son with her. Confessions, all somewhat very relatable to common age issues. Disobedience to parents, trying to fit in, life of sexuality, seeking

elegance, etc... These are all things of which many, in modern age, struggle with, but if one can repent and confess, our Lord will take them back with open arms.

Engulfed in a Worldly Society: Friends and Confessions

During his early years, St. Augustine formed a profound friendship with a contemporary companion who shared his academic pursuits and interests. This friendship, as St. Augustine himself reflects, was “sweeter to me than all the sweetness of my life thus far.” The two friends bonded over their shared studies and activities. However, their friendship took an unexpected turn when St. Augustine, influenced by Manichean beliefs, attempted to sway his friend away from his Christian faith. St. Augustine was able to “turn him away from the true faith” and “turn him toward those superstitious and harmful fables which my mother mourned in me” (namely, Manichaeism) so that, “With me, this man went wandering off in error and my soul could not exist without him” (Conf. 4.4.7). St. Augustine's friend, whom he never names, succumbed to Augustine's persuasion and abandoned his true faith, much to the dismay of St. Augustine's mother, who had been mourning St. Augustine's own involvement with Manichaeism.

Consequently, St. Augustine and his friend embarked on a misguided journey together, with St. Augustine's soul feeling incomplete without his companion. Their bond deepened in their shared error, as they both strayed from the path of truth. However, their journey took a dramatic turn when St. Augustine's friend fell severely ill and approached death's door. Fearing the worst, his family arranged for him to be baptized, a religious ritual that St. Augustine scoffed at and assumed his friend would share his disdain for. To St. Augustine's surprise and dismay, when his friend recovered, he discovered that his attitude had transformed. St. Augustine, expecting his friend to dismiss the baptism as mere religious nonsense, was shocked to find that his friend had embraced it wholeheartedly. “Immediately, as soon as I could talk to him,” writes Augustine:

And I did this as soon as he was able, for I never left him and we hung on each other overmuch—I tried to jest with him, supposing that he also would jest in return about that baptism which he had received when his mind and senses were inactive, but which he had since learned that he had received. But he recoiled from me, as if I were his enemy, and, with a remarkable and unexpected freedom, he admonished me that, if I desired to continue as his friend, I must cease to say such things” (Conf. 4.4.7).

In the depths of his being, he felt an inconsolable sorrow, a profound emptiness that gnawed at his soul. The loss of his first close friend had shattered his world, leaving him adrift in a sea of grief and uncertainty. He wandered through his native place, once familiar and comforting, now transformed into a torture chamber. Every street, every corner, held memories of his friend—laughter shared, secrets whispered, and moments of pure joy. Now, those memories turned into sharp, piercing thorns, reminders of what was lost and could never be regained. A profound hatred filled his heart as he looked upon the places where his friend was not. The places that once held the promise of happiness and companionship now seemed cruel and taunting, for they could not offer him the one thing he longed for the most. They could not say, "Look, he is coming," as they had when his friend was alive and absent.

My heart was utterly darkened by this sorrow and everywhere I looked I saw death. My native place was a torture room to me . . . And all the things I had done with him—now that he was gone—became a frightful torment. My eyes sought him everywhere, but they did not see him; and I hated all places because he was not in them, because they could not say to me, "Look, he is coming," as they did when he was alive and absent (Conf. 4.4.9).

Early Church Fathers' Relationships Influencing One Another

Throughout the history of early Christianity, there have been numerous spiritually fruitful friendships that serve as a testament to the importance of surrounding oneself with spiritually-minded individuals. Among the most notable of these relationships are those between St. Paul and St. Timothy, as evidenced in the Epistle of St. Paul to St. Timothy. Their friendship was characterized by mutual respect, admiration, and a shared commitment to spreading the teachings of Christ.

Another remarkable friendship was that between St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, as revealed in the Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp. These two men shared a deep bond of faith and love for the Church, and their letters to each other offer valuable insights into the spiritual lives of early Christians. In addition to these well-known pairings, St. Maximus and Domadius were also close companions. Their friendship was built on a foundation of mutual support and encouragement, and they worked together to advance the cause of Christianity in their community.

Collaboration was also a key aspect of the friendship between St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil. Together, they authored the work "On the Priesthood," which remains an important text for understanding the role and responsibilities of priests in the Church. In previous chapters, we explored

the influential friendship of the Cappadocian Fathers: St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Their intellectual pursuits and shared theological insights shaped the development of Christian thought and continue to inspire believers today.

Finally, we turn our attention to the friendship between St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, which will be the focus of this chapter. Their relationship was pivotal in St. Augustine's spiritual transformation. St. Ambrose served as a mentor and guide to St. Augustine, helping him to navigate his struggles with faith and identity and ultimately leading him to embrace Christianity.

These friendships serve as inspiring examples of the power of spiritual companionship. They remind us that surrounding ourselves with like-minded individuals can help us grow in faith, overcome challenges, and fulfill our potential as followers of Christ.

St. Ambrose

St. Ambrose, born between 337 and 339 AD in what is now Germany, hailed from a rich family. His birthplace remains uncertain, but historical accounts suggest it was somewhere within the Germanic region. From an early age, St. Ambrose displayed a keen intellect and an aptitude for learning.

In his youth, St. Ambrose relocated to Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire, to pursue higher education. He immersed himself in the study of rhetoric, the art of effective and persuasive speaking and writing. Through rigorous training, he mastered the use of figures of speech and compositional techniques, honing his skills in oratory and argumentation.

After completing his studies, St. Ambrose returned to his homeland, where he gained recognition for his eloquence and wisdom. In 374 AD, a significant event transpired in Milan, the capital of the Western Roman Empire. The bishop of Milan, who adhered to Arianism—a controversial theological doctrine that denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ—passed away, leaving a void in the leadership of the Christian community.

At this time, tensions escalated between the Arians and those who believed in the divinity of Christ. Both factions, recognizing St. Ambrose's exceptional qualities, converged in their support for him to become the next bishop of Milan. Remarkably, St. Ambrose was not yet a deacon or a priest, nor had he received baptism, when he was chosen for this esteemed position. To prepare for his role as bishop, St. Ambrose underwent an intensive period of study and instruction in Christianity. Within a

week of his formal baptism, he received ordination, a sacred ceremony that marked his elevation to the highest rank of the clergy.

St. Ambrose was described as the “..complete man with amazing gifts. He was both active and contemplative. He was intellectual and he was an orator. He was someone who won over St. Augustine and beat him on his own ground. He was always able to cope with the most difficult situations and tasks without any effort.” He advocated for the poor and the weak. One of his many writings is “The Story of Naboth” where he advocates for the just sharing of possessions. He made sure to educate the clergy to stay away from Arianism. He also wrote a series called: “On the Duties of the Clergy,” Finally, some of his other works are regarding the Holy Spirit, on the Mysteries, as well as on Repentance.

St. Ambrose’s Influence on St. Augustine

In Book 5 of his Confessions, St. Augustine recounts his arrival in Milan and his encounter with St. Ambrose, the bishop of the city. St. Augustine had heard of St. Ambrose’s reputation as an eloquent speaker, and he was eager to experience his oratory firsthand. He was not disappointed. St. Ambrose’s sermons were powerful and persuasive, and St. Augustine was captivated by his ability to communicate the Christian faith in a way that was both intellectually stimulating and spiritually moving.

St. Augustine’s initial attraction to Ambrose was primarily based on his eloquence. However, as he listened to St. Ambrose preach more regularly, he began to appreciate the depth of his faith and his commitment to the Christian community. St. Augustine was particularly impressed by St. Ambrose’s ability to defend the faith against the objections of the Manichees, a Gnostic sect that St. Augustine had been associated with for many years. St. Ambrose’s preaching helped St. Augustine to see that the faith was not as irrational or indefensible as he had once thought. He began to understand that the Bible could be interpreted figuratively as well as literally, and that this opened up new possibilities for understanding the Christian faith.

“to Milan I came, to Ambrose the Bishop... whose eloquent discourse did then plentifully dispense unto Thy people ... **That man of God received me as a father**, and showed me an Episcopal kindness on my coming. Thereafter **I began to love him....** And **I listened diligently** to him preaching to the people, not with that intent I ought, but, as it were, trying his eloquence, whether it answered the fame thereof, or flowed fuller or lower than was reported; ... For first, these things also had now begun to appear to me capable of defense; and the Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said against the Manichees’ objections, I

now thought might be maintained without shamelessness; especially after I had heard one or two places of the Old Testament resolved, and oftentimes “in a figure,” which when I understood literally, **I was slain spiritually...**“

St. Augustine's encounter with St. Ambrose was a turning point in his spiritual journey. It was through Ambrose's influence that St. Augustine eventually came to embrace the faith and to become one of the most influential theologians in the history of the church. In addition to his preaching, St. Ambrose also showed St. Augustine great personal kindness. He welcomed St. Augustine into his home and treated him like a son. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine states, "That man of God received me as a father would, and welcomed my coming as a good bishop should." This paternal care helped St. Augustine to heal from the wounds of his past and to begin to rebuild his life on a new foundation.

Why did St. Augustine come back to Christ? He returned because of the tears of his mother, St. Monica, as well as due to the wisdom and the intellectual capabilities of his bishop: St. Ambrose. God saw that “Augustine was a sincere seeker of the truth.” God worked through St. Ambrose to reveal Himself to St. Augustine. Moreover, the tears of St. Monica depicts what kind of heart she had, and her own relationship with Christ. Our beloved God sees each and everyone of us. He knows who is a “truth seeker,” and who is not. God will never forsake a “Truth seeker,” but rather, guide them to Himself. We should all strive to be inspiring like St. Ambrose. Our service can make a difference, just like that of St. Ambrose on St. Augustine.

St. Augustine and his surroundings provide us with one of the most striking examples of one running along the Lord's path with sincere zeal. He did just like the rabbit that was able with merely one hop to accomplish what the turtle had done in a number of days. St. Augustine was very far from God. He did not know the Lord for thirty long years, and many people had already surpassed him in the way of righteousness and godliness. Yet the minute he came to his senses and was drawn by the Lord, he was able to reach the first ranks with merely a few hops. With a few more, he became a spiritual counselor. With some more hops, he became one of the saints. Now, we all chant the name of St. Augustine until today. How so? He would run. He ran along the paths of the Lord, unlike those who are merely satisfied with their information desks and only content to point the way. Rather, St. Augustine was a man serious in his pursuit. Draw me away! We will run after you.

St. Augustine Notable Books

St. Augustine's writings covered a wide range of theological and philosophical topics. His "Confessions" is a deeply personal work in which he reflects on his life, his struggles, and his eventual

conversion to Christianity. It provides insights into his inner thoughts and emotions and is considered a classic of Christian literature.

The "City of God" is a monumental work in which he addresses fundamental questions of theology and philosophy. He explores the nature of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between faith and reason, and the destiny of human beings. The "City of God" is a profound and ambitious work that has influenced Christian thought for centuries.

St. Augustine's writings on the Trinity, "De Trinitate", focus on the concept of the Logos, the Divine Word, and His relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He argues that the Logos is not merely a created being but an eternal aspect of God's nature and that the Trinity is a mystery that can only be understood through faith.

In his work "On Christian Doctrine", St. Augustine outlines principles for interpreting and teaching the Scriptures. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the context and genre of biblical texts and of seeking to discover the truth in their content. He also discusses the need to defend scriptural truth when it is attacked, arguing that the Scriptures are the authoritative word of God.

St. Augustine's writings have had a profound impact on Christian theology and thought. His insights into the human condition, the nature of God, and the relationship between faith and reason have influenced countless thinkers and continue to be studied and debated today.



Review Questions

1. What is St. Augustine's most notable work? (A: Confessions)
2. True or false? His mother was a pagan. (A: False)
3. True or false? St. Augustine was born a devout Christian. (A: False)
4. Who inspired him to find Christianity again? (A: St. Ambrose)
5. What religion did he fall into before finding our Lord? (A: Manichaeism)
6. What did said religion preach? (A: It claims that everything falls under good or evil.)
7. True or false? St. Ambrose came from a poor family. (A: False)
8. Why did St. Augustine come back to Christ? (A: He returned because of the tears of his mother, and the wisdom of St. Ambrose.)
9. What is another relationship, like St. Augustine and St. Ambrose between Church

Fathers? (A: St. Paul and St. Timothy.)

10. Name two more of St. Augustine's works or their topics. (Sample A: City of God, as well as his writing on the Trinity.)



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

Unit 3

3.1 Letters

Letter To Marcellinus

PATRISTICS

A Handbook for the Psalms

The Letter to Marcellinus, written by St. Athanasius to his disciple Marcellinus, stands as the earliest known handbook for using the Psalms in personal devotional meditation, distinct from the communal singing of Psalms in a congregational setting. This significant text holds a special place in the history of Christian spiritual practices. One notable example of the early church's appreciation for the Psalms is St. Basil's account of his monks beginning each day by singing Psalm 50. This practice underscores the importance of the Psalms as a devotional tool for personal spiritual growth.

The Letter to Marcellinus gained such prominence that one of the earliest manuscripts of the Greek translations of the Bible, known as Codex Alexandrinus, included it directly before the book of Psalms. This manuscript is currently housed in the British Library in London and remains on display to this day.

Long before the Letter to Marcellinus, the Psalms had already played a central role in worship settings, with many individuals memorizing the entire Psalter. This tradition continues in the present day, as the Liturgy of the Hours, a form of daily prayer in the Catholic Church, incorporates substantial Psalmody. Notably, the Psalms found in the Liturgy of the Hours include those very prayers that Jesus Himself prayed during His time on earth.

The Letter to Marcellinus goes beyond devotional use, offering systematic instruction on the nature and appropriate use of the Psalms. It provides guidance on understanding the Psalms' literary forms, their theological themes, and their relevance to personal spiritual formation.

Who was Marcellinus?

Marcellinus was possibly a deacon or a monk who dedicated his life to studying and understanding the Bible. During an illness, his passion for the Scriptures led him to embark on a profound journey of exploration, seeking to uncover the hidden depths of wisdom within the Psalms.

Driven by an insatiable curiosity, Marcellinus questioned the significance of each Psalm, longing to unravel its unique message and symbolism. He desired to comprehend how the Psalter, a collection of poetic prayers and songs, intertwined with the rest of Scripture.

This pursuit impressed St. Athanasius, who in turn expressed his desire to share his mediation on the psalms to him: “Not only are you bearing well your present trial, with its attendant suffering; you are even living under rule and, so the bearer of your letter tells me, using the leisure necessitated by your recent illness to study the whole body of the Holy Scriptures and especially the Psalms. Of every one of those, he says, you are trying to grasp the inner force and sense. Splendid! I myself am devoted to the Psalms, as indeed to the whole Bible; and I once talked with a certain studious old man, who had bestowed much labour on the Psalter, and discoursed to me about it with great persuasiveness and charm, expressing himself clearly too, and holding a copy of it in his hand the while he spoke. So I am going to write down for you the things he said.”

Design of the Letter

St. Athanasius unveiled the intricate plan of his discourse, captivating his audience with a profound analogy. He likened each book of the Bible to a unique garden, each flourishing with its own distinctive fruit. However, the Psalter, he explained, stood apart as an extraordinary garden, for it not only bore its own special fruit but also embraced a mosaic of fruits from all the other gardens. “Each of these books, you see, is like a garden which grows one special kind of fruit; by contrast, the Psalter is a garden which, besides its special fruit, grows also some those of all the rest. A demonstration of the Psalters recap of themes found in the Law and the Prophets.”

With eloquence and erudition, St. Athanasius embarked on a journey through the Psalms, demonstrating how this remarkable book encapsulated the themes and narratives found in both the Law and the Prophets. He revealed how the Psalter echoed the creation stories of Genesis, the wanderings of Exodus, the covenant promises of Deuteronomy, and the wisdom teachings of Proverbs. He unveiled how it resonated with the prophetic messages of Isaiah, the denunciations of Amos, and the lamentations of Jeremiah.

The analysis showcased the Psalter as a tapestry woven with threads from every corner of Scripture. He explored how the Psalms mirrored the joys of weddings, the anguish of funerals, the triumphs of victories, and the despair of defeats. He demonstrated how it reflected the hope of the righteous, the struggles of the oppressed, and the yearnings of the faithful.

Through his insightful exposition, St. Athanasius unveiled the Psalter as a microcosm of the entire biblical narrative, a garden where the fruits of faith, wisdom, love, justice, and redemption intermingled, creating a symphony of divine revelation. His audience, captivated by his eloquence and inspired by his insights, recognized the Psalter as more than a mere collection of songs; it was a living testament to the profound interconnectedness of God's Word.

Argument for the Uniqueness of the Psalter

The Psalms are considered immediate and personal, allowing individuals to express their emotions and connect with God through these words. The Psalms serve various purposes, including praise, thanksgiving, lament, and petition, making them versatile and relatable to a wide range of human experiences.

The classification of the Psalms is based on their content, style, and purpose. Some psalms are categorized as hymns of praise, expressing adoration and gratitude to God. Others are laments, in which the psalmist pours out their soul, expressing sorrow, doubt, and seeking comfort. Wisdom Psalms offer guidance and ethical teachings, while royal Psalms celebrate the authority and justice of the king.

Misunderstandings and abuses of the Psalter, the book containing the Psalms, have occurred over time. Some have misinterpreted the Psalms as mere historical records or literary compositions, neglecting their spiritual and devotional significance. Others have used the Psalms to justify violence, oppression, or personal gain, which is a gross misrepresentation of their intended purpose.

In Jewish worship, the Psalms play an integral role. They have been the liturgical texts of the Jews since ancient times and are incorporated into various services and celebrations. In the Temple, Psalms were chanted by Levites, accompanied by musical instruments, creating a sacred atmosphere. In synagogues, Psalms are recited during daily prayers, weekly Sabbath services, and major festivals like Passover.

The weekly synagogue worship includes a specific order of prayers, passages from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), and the Nebi'im (prophets). Additionally, a Homily or "Explanation" is delivered to provide insights and teachings. Following this, a rotation of Psalms is chanted, typically including selections from Psalms 105-107, 111-119, 116-118, 135, 136, and 146-150.

The chanter recites each verse of the Psalm, and a choir responds by repeating the first verse. At the end of the Psalm, a doxology is offered, praising God and inviting the congregation to respond with "Amen." This call and response create a participatory and communal experience, allowing worshippers to engage actively in the liturgy.

Psalms in Jewish Worship

In daily Temple services, the psalms hold a significant place. One notable practice is the daily Psalm, recited at the morning and evening sacrifices. Israelites, as read in Deuteronomy 16:16, were required three times a year to appear before the LORD for the three Great Feasts observed: Passover/Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles. During these festivals, every adult male was required to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem, the holy city.

Jerusalem, the spiritual heart of Judaism, is situated atop a high hill, adding to its revered status. As Jews embarked on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for these festivals, they traditionally sang a collection of songs on the "ascent" or the uphill road leading to the city. These songs, known as 'the Psalms of Ascent', served as an expression of devotion and joy during their journey.

Comprised of Psalms 120 to 134, the Psalms of Ascent encompass a range of emotions and themes. They reflect on the beauty of Jerusalem, the longing for pilgrimage, and the joy of communal worship. Some psalms express trust in God's guidance and protection, while others celebrate the unity and solidarity of the Jewish people.

Within the Temple's two courts, there were fifteen steps that pilgrims had to ascend to reach the inner sanctum. It is believed that each Psalm was chanted as individuals ascended each step, creating a harmonious and uplifting atmosphere. The chanting of these psalms added a profound spiritual dimension to the pilgrimage, enhancing the sense of connection between the worshippers and the divine.

Various occasions throughout the religious calendar of Judaism call for specific psalms and hymns to be recited or chanted. One notable example is the "Great Hallel." This Hallel consists of Psalms 136, also known as the second Hos. The Great Hallel holds a prominent place in Jewish liturgy and is traditionally recited during significant festivals and holidays. During Passover, the Great Hallel is recited as part of the seder ritual, which commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The recitation of the Great Hallel serves to express gratitude and praise to God for the Exodus.

story and the deliverance of the Jewish people. Another occasion when the Great Hallel is recited is the Feast of Trumpets, also known as Rosh Hashanah, which marks the beginning of the Jewish civil new year. Additionally, the first day of each month also has its designated psalm, Psalm 81, with its opening line: "Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon..."

The Feast of Tabernacles also incorporates psalms into its celebrations, with Psalms 65 and 67 serving as appropriate words for the harvest and storing. Moreover, the four cups of wine during Passover are accompanied by Psalms 113 to 118 (Hallel), with Psalms 113 and 114 read after the fourth cup. It is believed that these psalms were likely chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ on the night of His suffering with His disciples, as mentioned in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26.

Christians in Later Centuries

St. Athanasius, in his letter to Marcellinus, specifically in Psalm 136, and in his *Apologia de Fuga* 24, emphasized the universal practice of praying with Psalms in churches worldwide. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, a renowned church historian of the early 4th century, the practice of praying with Psalms was prevalent in churches worldwide. This tradition was not confined to a particular region or sect but embraced by Christian communities far and wide. Eusebius's observations highlight the unifying power of Psalms, transcending geographical boundaries and cultural differences.

St. John Chrysostom, a prominent theologian and bishop of Constantinople in the 4th century, further solidified the significance of Psalms within church liturgy. He instituted daily Psalms prayers in the church, with Psalm 63 designated for the morning and Psalm 141 for the evening. These selections were thoughtfully chosen, as they align with the themes of hope and protection that accompany the rising and setting of the sun. By incorporating Psalms into the daily rhythm of church life, St. John Chrysostom emphasized their relevance and comfort for believers.

Moreover, St. John Chrysostom's interpretation of Psalm 42 provides a profound insight into the essence of faith. He explains that the Psalm emphasizes the importance of 'the reply,' which symbolizes the reciprocal nature of our relationship with God. According to his understanding, 'the reply' represents the covenant we make with our Lord, acknowledging His sovereignty and committing ourselves to His will. This interpretation underscores the significance of actively engaging with God through prayer and devotion, recognizing that a meaningful connection with the divine requires both our invocation and His response.

Interpretation of the Psalms

By the fourth century, Christian thinkers had developed various methods of analyzing and interpreting the Psalms. One notable approach originated in Alexandria, Egypt, and emphasized a gradual progression from simpler to more profound interpretations of the Scriptures. This approach allowed for the use of specific verses from the Psalms as "proof texts" in doctrinal disputes. For instance, Psalm 35:10—"In your light we shall see light"—was cited as evidence of the eternal nature of the Word.

Beyond their use as proof texts, the Psalms were also seen as a comprehensive summary of the Old Testament, preparing readers for the teachings of the New Testament. They were believed to present a vivid depiction of the soul's journey through life, offering guidance and inspiration for believers seeking spiritual growth and transformation.

In addition to their theological and practical significance, the Psalms were also valued for their literary and poetic qualities. Their diverse genres, including hymns of praise, prayers of lament, and songs of thanksgiving, showcased the broad range of human emotions and experiences. The vivid imagery, metaphors, and symbols found in the Psalms captivated readers and provided a rich source of spiritual contemplation and reflection.

Moreover, the Psalms played a vital role in shaping Christian liturgy and worship. They were incorporated into early Christian services and became an essential part of communal and private prayer, helping to shape the spiritual lives of believers throughout the centuries. The Psalms provided a common language for expressing devotion, repentance, praise, and thanksgiving, fostering a sense of unity and fellowship among Christians.

St. Athanasius offered a unique interpretation of the psalms that differed from the teachings of the Alexandrian School of theology, as exemplified by St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The Alexandrian School, known for its allegorical interpretation of Scripture, was heavily influenced by Platonic thought. Figures like St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen sought to find deeper, often mystical meanings in the Scriptures, including the Psalms. Origen, in particular, was known for his threefold method of interpretation: the literal, moral, and allegorical. He believed that the deeper, spiritual meaning was the most important aspect of Scripture.

Unlike many theological writings of his time, St. Athanasius's interpretation was not intended to be polemical or confrontational. Instead, he emphasized the practical and spiritual application of the Psalms in the life of the believer. He viewed the Psalms not just as texts for scholarly interpretation but as a guide for Christian living, prayer, and moral development. Through his interpretation of the psalms, St. Athanasius imparted profound spiritual wisdom and guidance. He explored various themes that resonated with the human experience, including the righteous and wicked, God's law, the end of one's life, and the conduct of leaders. He emphasized the importance of praise and thanksgiving to God for His goodness, mercy, and unique characteristics. Additionally, he delved into themes of repentance, trust in God during times of difficulty, sorrow accompanied by hope, and the need for divine help. St. Athanasius's interpretation sought to guide believers toward a deeper understanding of their faith and a closer relationship with God. Through his exegesis, St. Athanasius provided a framework for comprehending the psalms as a source of comfort, guidance, and inspiration.

His interpretation also highlighted the interconnectedness of the human soul with the divine realm. St. Athanasius emphasized that through the psalms, individuals could engage in a profound dialogue with God, expressing their emotions, seeking His wisdom, and finding solace in His presence. He viewed the psalms as a means of drawing closer to God and experiencing the transformative power of His love and grace.

Effects of the Psalms

While the Psalter's words are not more Holy than the other writings in the Bible, God honors the supplications made in the words of the Psalm. The person praying the Psalms may apply it to him/herself. Two people going through different trials, or tribulations, may pray the same Psalm yet apply it to their unique circumstance. Recall that liturgical prayer is personal, and personal prayer is liturgical. "It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given...but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself." The Psalms reveal your inner self, as well as teach you how to repent, or what words to say for perfect repentance and how to stay away from sin; "we are shown exactly with what words to voice our hope in God." In the rest of the Bible you are told what to do, but in the Psalms you are shown and told *how* to do it.

"He sketched the likeness of this perfect life for us in words, in this same book of Psalms; in order that, just as He revealed Himself in flesh to be the perfect,

heavenly Man, so in the Psalms also men of good-will might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own.”

For every and any condition, situation, or life’s occasion, the Psalms act like prescriptions, each one uniquely fit for the background at hand. St. Athanasius thus prescribes: “Suppose, then, for example, that you want to declare anyone to be blessed; you find the way to do it in Psalm 1, and likewise in 32, 41, 112, 119, and 128. If you want to rebuke the conspiracy of the Jews against the Saviour, you have Psalm 2. If you are persecuted by your own family and opposed by many, say Psalm 3; and when you would give thanks to God at your affliction's end, sing 4 and 75 and 116. When you see the wicked wanting to ensnare you and you wish your prayer to reach God's ears, then wake up early and sing 5; and if you feel yourself beneath the cloud of His displeasure, you can say 6 and 38. If any plot against you, as did Ahithophel against David, and someone tells you of it, sing Psalm 7, and put your trust in God Who will deliver you.”

On the Psalms Hymnology

In the world of hymnology, St. Athanasius elucidates the profound significance of the Psalms and their melodic recitation. He emphasizes that the purpose of melodies in the Psalms is not solely to create pleasant sounds but rather to serve as a tangible manifestation of the soul's harmony and spiritual tranquility. “Therefore the Psalms are not recited with melodies because of a desire for pleasant sounds. Rather, this is a sure sign of the harmony of the soul’s reflections.” Deacons, likewise, must approach hymnology with a similar mindset. Just as the Psalm were considered songs at the time, the hymnology praised by deacons, should not be a mere collection of beautiful sounds, but rather the elevation of the soul.

According to St. Athanasius, the harmonious reading of the Psalms symbolizes the undisturbed and calm equanimity of our thoughts. He likens the ideas of the soul and their communication through words to the Lord's desire for the melody of the Psalms to represent the spiritual harmony within a soul. He underscores the importance of chanting the odes tunefully and reciting the Psalms with song as a symbolic act of aligning oneself with the divine.

St. Athanasius also highlights that those who do not recite the divine songs in this manner are not singing them wisely. While they may find personal enjoyment in their singing, they incur blame because a hymn of praise is not suitable on the lips of a sinner. However, when individuals chant in the way he describes, the melody of the phrases flows from the soul's good order and concord with the

Spirit. Such individuals not only benefit themselves but also greatly benefit those willing to hear them, as their singing resonates with the depth and beauty of their spiritual harmony.

“The harmonious reading of the Psalms is a figure and type of such undisturbed and calm equanimity of our thoughts. For just as we discover the ideas of the soul and communicate them through the words we put forth, so also the Lord, wishing the melody of the words to be a symbol of the spiritual harmony in a soul, has ordered that the odes be chanted tunefully, and the Psalms recited with song...Those who do not recite the divine songs in this manner do not sing them wisely. They bring delight to themselves, but they incur blame, because a hymn of praise is not suitable on the lips of a sinner. But when they chant in the way mentioned earlier, so that the melody of the phrases is brought forth from the soul’s good order and from the concord with the Spirit, such people sing with the tongue, but singing also with the mind they greatly benefit not only themselves but even those willing to hear them.”

St. Athanasius further emphasizes the importance of preserving the original words of the Psalms and avoiding the temptation to alter or embellish them with profane phrases. He encourages the faithful to recite and chant the Psalms as they were written, recognizing that the holy men who provided these words will join in their prayers and that the Spirit who spoke through the saints will render assistance. He asserts that the words of the saints are superior to those we construct, carrying greater power and effectiveness due to the exalted nature of their lives and their profound spiritual connection.

“Do not let anyone amplify these words of the Psalter with the persuasive phrases of the profane, and do not let him attempt to recast or completely change the words. Rather let him recite and chant, without artifice, the things written just as they were spoken, in order for the holy men who supplied these, recognizing that which is their own, to join you in your prayer, or, rather, so that even the Spirit who speaks in the saints, seeing words inspired by him in them, might render assistance to us. For as much better as the life of the saints is than that of other people, by so much also are their expressions superior to those we construct and, if one were to speak the truth, more powerful as well.”

Through this discourse, St. Athanasius invites us to engage with the Psalms not merely as aesthetic compositions but as spiritual practices that reflect and cultivate the harmony of our souls. By embracing the Psalms' melodic recitation, we align ourselves with the wisdom and grace of the saints and open ourselves to the transformative power of the divine Spirit, enriching our worship and deepening our spiritual lives.

Letter to Marcellinus Summarized

Psalms hold a unique and profound significance as they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. This divine inspiration guides us in our prayers, offering a glimpse into how we ought to pray to God. Additionally, the Psalms embrace inclusivity, encompassing various aspects of Scripture within their verses. No other section of Scripture possesses this distinctive feature.

Many Psalms carry prophetic undertones, known as Messianic Psalms. For instance, Psalm 22, with its poignant words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Psalm 110, similarly, speaks of the enthronement of the Lord at the right hand of the Father: “The Lord said to My Lord, sit at My right hand...”

Furthermore, the Psalms serve as a mirror, reflecting the emotions and movements of the soul. They educate us on how we ought to feel while engaged in prayer. Conversely, they guide us on what prayers to offer when certain emotions arise, even if they involve expressions of complaint or frustration. In the Psalms, we witness David expressing his discontent, questioning God, “How long, O Lord, do You forget me, forever?” Despite his emotions, the Holy Spirit directs David's heart towards God, guiding him through his feelings.

The Psalms are deeply personal, though they may have been written by individuals such as David or Asaph. However, when we stand before the Lord, these prayers transcend their original authors and become our own personal expressions to God. The Psalms offer a profound connection, allowing us to communicate our innermost thoughts and emotions directly to the divine.

The Psalms in the Orthodox Church

Psalms lie at the core of our liturgical worship today. Their presence can be felt throughout the Agpeya, in the Psalmody that fills our churches, and in the very fabric of our liturgy and services. From the solemn observances of Good Friday to the monks adorned in the Eskim, Psalms accompany us on every sacred journey. They are recited before the departure of the Pope or Bishop, and their words are woven into the Orban, a special prayer that invokes God's blessings.

The beauty of Psalms extends beyond their liturgical significance. They are also a source of personal worship, a way for individuals to connect with the divine. By studying and memorizing Psalms, we open ourselves up to their transformative power. They become a constant companion,

guiding us through our daily lives and offering comfort in times of need. The words of Pope Shenouda III ring true: "Preserve the Psalms, and the Psalms will preserve you." By incorporating Psalms into our prayers and meditations, we create a sacred space within ourselves, a sanctuary where we can encounter the divine and find solace.

Liturgical worship and personal worship are not separate entities but intimately intertwined. In the act of singing Psalms together, we unite our voices in a symphony of praise and adoration. At the same time, each individual heart is touched by the words and melodies, creating a deeply personal experience of communion with God.

Whether we stand in a crowded church or sit in the quiet of our own homes, Psalms have the power to transcend time and space, connecting us with generations past and present. They are a bridge between heaven and earth, a reminder that we are part of a larger story, a story of faith, hope, and love that spans the ages.

So let us embrace the Psalms, committing them to memory and allowing their words to shape our hearts and minds. For in the Psalms, we find not only a rich tradition of worship but also a profound source of personal transformation and spiritual growth.



Review Questions

1. Where are some places where Psalms are used/found? (A: Agpeya, Psalmody, liturgy, services, Good Friday, monks wearing the Eskim, departure of Pope/Bishop, making Orban, etc.)
2. True or false? Psalms are used in Jewish worship. (A: True)
3. What did St. Athanasius say regarding Psalms? (A: "Therefore the Psalms are not recited with melodies because of a desire for pleasant sounds. Rather, this is a sure sign of the harmony of the soul's reflections.")
4. Who was Marcellinus? (A: He was perhaps a deacon or a monk.)
5. True or false? Jewish people recite a daily Psalm. (A: True)



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 evenly spaced lines.

3.1 Letters

Letter To Diognetus

PATRISTICS

Significance of the Letter

The author of this letter to Diognetus, a disciple to the Apostles, remains unknown. The letter, written in an epistle format, was addressed to a man named Diognetus, who some scholars believe may have been a pseudonym or a nickname. It is believed to have been composed in Asia Minor around 129 AD, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian.

The letter is significant for several reasons. It is the earliest surviving piece of Christian literature that was not written to a fellow Christian, but rather to a pagan. This suggests that the early Church was already reaching out to non-believers and engaging in dialogue with them. Moreover, the letter is considered an epistle of the Apostolic Fathers, a collection of writings attributed to the early leaders of the Church who may have had direct influence from Christ's disciples and apostles. This gives the letter a unique authority and historical significance.

The author's purpose in writing the letter was to provide a defense and explanation of the Christian faith to Diognetus. He begins by refuting common pagan misconceptions about Christians, such as the accusations that they were atheists or cannibals. The author then goes on to expound on the nature of God, the uniqueness of Christ, and the ethical teachings of Christianity. He argues that Christians are not opposed to society but rather offer a positive alternative to the moral decay and spiritual emptiness of the pagan world.

The letter to Diognetus is a powerful and eloquent defense of the Christian faith. It provides valuable insights into the early Church's understanding of its beliefs and practices. It also reveals the Church's willingness to engage in dialogue and apologetics with non-believers, a practice that continues to be important in contemporary times.

The Unknown Author

The author of the letter, though anonymous, seems profoundly cultured and educated, as evidenced by the flawless Greek rhetoric employed throughout the text. This author skillfully taps into the prevailing cynicism among the ruling class of the time, who had begun to question the divinity of the Greek and Roman gods. The ruling class, once revered as gods by the masses and worshiped with incense offerings, harbored a secret awareness of their own mortality, leading many to embrace agnosticism.

Amidst this atmosphere of skepticism, Christianity emerged as a novel and polarizing force. Recognizing the curiosity surrounding this new faith, the author strategically capitalizes on this sentiment. Through eloquent prose and persuasive arguments, the author endeavors to sway the hearts and minds of the ruling class, urging them to embrace Christianity as a beacon of hope and spiritual fulfillment. He skillfully attempts to bridge the gap between skepticism and faith, inviting the ruling class to embark on a journey of spiritual exploration and transformation.

Preaching to Non-Christians

One of the things this letter teaches is valuable insights into how to effectively preach the gospel to non-Christians. The writer's approach is to start by identifying the questions and concerns commonly raised by his audience. These questions reflect the pagan beliefs and perspectives prevalent at that time. Among the questions posed by the pagans are "Who is this God that you worship?", "What is the source of love that you all have for each other?", and "Why did it take so long for this new way of living to appear on earth?"

Addressing these questions, the writer refrains from using references that would be unfamiliar or incomprehensible to the pagan reader, like Jewish scripture or apostolic writings. Instead, the writer appeals to common sense and reason, seeking to establish a connection with the pagan mindset. The writer recognizes that the concept of Christianity is entirely new and unfamiliar to the pagans. Therefore, the writer repeatedly emphasizes a central theme: Christianity brings something brand new into the world. This message is conveyed to the pagans using arguments and illustrations that align with their understanding and experiences.

The writer's approach challenges the pagan worldview and offers a compelling alternative. By engaging with the questions and concerns of the pagans, the writer seeks to open their minds to the possibility of a new way of living and understanding the world. In this way, the letter provides a valuable model for gospel preaching in any era. It demonstrates the importance of adapting the

message to the specific audience, addressing their doubts and objections, and presenting Christianity as a transformative force that offers a fresh perspective on life and the divine.

Radical Newness

The author's words emphasize the importance of clearing one's mind of preconceptions and outdated perspectives in order to receive a truly new message: "Now, then, clear out all the thoughts that take up your attention, and pack away all the old ways of looking at things that keep deceiving you. You must be like a new man from the beginning, since, as you yourself admit, you are going to listen to a really new message." The metaphor of "packing away" old ways of thinking highlights the intentional act of letting go of limiting beliefs and biases. The emphasis on "listening to a really new message" invites the reader to embrace a transformative understanding. By encouraging the reader to "clear out all the thoughts that take up your attention," the writer emphasizes the importance of mental clarity and focus. This process of decluttering one's mind allows for the emergence of new ideas, perspectives, and insights.

In the text, the author emphasizes that Christianity stands apart from other sects and religions of its time by appealing to human nature rather than human ethnicity. Unlike ethnic religions such as Osiris in Egypt or Mithras in Persia, which retained local characteristics despite their potential for spread, Christianity surpassed cultural and geographic boundaries.

The author explains that Christians were not distinguished by their country, language, or customs. They did not reside in exclusive cities, use a unique dialect, or lead peculiar lifestyles. Their behaviors were not the product of human speculation or deliberation, nor did they advocate solely for human doctrines. Instead, Christians resided in both Greek and barbarian cities, adapting to local customs while simultaneously displaying their distinct way of life. They inhabited their homelands like sojourners, participating fully in civic life while remaining conscious of their foreign status. Every foreign land became their homeland, and every homeland became a foreign land.

"For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing,

food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed.”

Several aspects of Christian living that exemplify their unique approach are highlighted by the author. Like others, Christians married and had children, but they refrained from infanticide, a practice in these ancient societies. They shared meals together, fostering a sense of community and equality, but they maintained separate sleeping arrangements, emphasizing the importance of an undefiled bed.

Christians, like the Soul within the Body

The author draws upon widely recognized concepts of Plato's works, particularly the distinction between body and soul, to elucidate the unique role of Christians within society. This comparison serves as a powerful analogy to illustrate their significance.

At the outset, the author equates Christians to the soul within the body. Just as the soul permeates and animates every part of the body, Christians are dispersed throughout all cities of the world, exerting a profound influence. However, while the soul inhabits the body, it remains distinct and transcendent. Likewise, Christians dwell in the world but are not defined or limited by its materialistic pursuits. The author further emphasizes the invisible nature of the soul, guarded by the visible body. In a similar vein, Christians may be physically present in the world, but their true godliness and spirituality remain invisible to the casual observer. This distinction highlights the contrast between the external, worldly existence and the inner, spiritual reality of Christians.

“To sum up all in one word — what the soul is in the body, Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible.”

The author also delves into the relationship between the soul and the flesh, drawing parallels to the interaction between Christians and the world. Just as the soul encounters resistance and hostility from the flesh, which seeks to indulge in worldly pleasures, Christians face opposition and

persecution from those who reject their values and beliefs. Despite these challenges, the soul demonstrates its capacity for love and compassion, cherishing the very body that opposes it. Similarly, Christians extend love and forgiveness to those who persecute them, embodying the teachings of their faith.

The author goes on to describe the soul's confinement within the body, yet its ability to uphold and sustain that body. This parallels the experience of Christians, who, while confined to the limitations of the physical world, serve as a unifying force, holding society together. Additionally, the soul's temporary dwelling in a mortal tabernacle mirrors the Christian's earthly existence, viewed as a transient sojourn in corruptible bodies. Their hope lies in an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens, representing their ultimate destination and eternal reward.

The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, 1 Peter 2:11 though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet keeps together that very body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they keep together the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake.

The author then concludes by highlighting the remarkable resilience of Christians. Despite facing persecution and adversity, they thrive and grow in numbers, much like the soul that flourishes when deprived of excessive nourishment. This resilience stems from their divinely assigned position, which they are duty-bound to uphold.

Our God Actually Loves Us

In the ancient world of the 2nd century, the religious beliefs and practices of the Greeks, Romans, and Christians stood in stark contrast to one another. At the heart of this contrast lay the fundamental differences between the gods of the pagans and the God of the Christians.

The pagan gods of the Greeks and Romans were often depicted as flawed and capricious beings, more akin to powerful humans with superhuman abilities than to divine entities. They were known for their selfish desires, engaging in infidelity, manipulating mortals, and displaying volatile

and treacherous behavior. For the pagans, interacting with their gods required careful manipulation through bribery and gifts in order to curry favor and avoid divine wrath.

In stark contrast to the pagan gods stood the God of the Christians, a benevolent and compassionate deity who genuinely cared for and loved humanity. This concept of a God who was not only powerful but also deeply invested in the well-being of His creation was revolutionary for the pagans of the 2nd century. The Christian God was not a distant, aloof figure, but rather a philanthropist, a true friend of the human race.

This profound difference in the nature of God had a profound impact on the lives of those who embraced Christianity. For the first time, people had the assurance of a God who was not merely a force to be appeased, but rather a loving Father who cared deeply for their spiritual and physical well-being. This endearing concept of a God who was passionate about His creation brought comfort, hope, and purpose to countless individuals, transforming their lives and shaping the course of history.

The Love of the Incarnation

The love of God for humanity is made manifest in His incarnation. St. Gregory the Theologian, in the Gregorian Liturgy, eloquently expresses this truth, stating that “neither an angel nor an archangel, neither a patriarch nor a prophet have you entrusted with our salvation, but You without change, were incarnate and became man.”

Centuries before the convening of ecumenical councils and even before St. Gregory's time, the author of this letter, echoed a similar sentiment. He proclaimed that God did not send a subordinate being, such as an angel or a principality, to oversee our salvation. Rather, He sent the Designer and Maker of the universe Himself—the one who created all things.

“By sending to men some subordinate – an angel, or principality, or one of those who administer earthly affairs, or perhaps one of those to whom the government of things in heaven is entrusted. Rather, he sent the Designer and Maker of the universe himself...Now, did he send him, as a human mind might assume, to rule by tyranny, fear, and terror? Far from it! He sent him out of kindness and gentleness, like a king sending his son who is himself a king. He sent him as God; he sent him as man to men.”

This act of sending His Son to humanity was not motivated by a desire for tyranny, fear, or terror. Instead, it was an act of kindness and gentleness, akin to a king sending his son, who is also a

king, to rule over his people. God sent His Son as God and as man to humankind, demonstrating His profound love and care for us.

The Love of Free Will

In His infinite wisdom and compassion, God bestowed upon humanity the precious gift of free will. This profound expression of His love recognizes the inherent dignity and autonomy of each individual. Through free will, we possess the ability to make choices, shape our lives, and cultivate our relationship with God.

The author emphasizes God's deep respect for human freedom. He highlights that God does not employ force or compulsion to impose His will upon us. Instead, He chooses to engage with us through persuasion, inviting us to embrace His love and guidance. "He willed to save man by persuasion, not by compulsion, for compulsion is not God's way of working." This approach aligns with God's unwavering commitment to preserving our freedom and allowing us to grow in faith and understanding.

The idea that God respects human freedom was a prevalent theme in Christian discourse during the 2nd century. Numerous documents from that era reiterate this notion. By valuing our ability to choose, God empowers us to develop a genuine and meaningful relationship with Him, rooted in love and mutual respect.

Christian Love

Christian love, as defined by the ability of Christians to love, transcends mere ideas and is empowered by the supernatural power of God. This divine love enables martyrs to make the ultimate sacrifice, demonstrating the profound impact of this extraordinary force. As the author of the Epistle to Diognetus observed, "Do you not see how they are thrown to wild animals to make them deny the Lord, and how they are not vanquished? Do you not see that the more of them are punished, the more do others increase? These things do not seem to come from a human power; they are a mighty act of God, they are proofs of his presence."

Unlike the deities of Greek and Roman mythology, who utilized their extraordinary powers for their own personal gain, the Christian God employs His divinity to transform individuals into morally upright and virtuous beings. This divine intervention elevates humanity beyond its natural limitations, allowing Christians to embody the ideals of compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love.

The transformative power of Christian love extends beyond individual acts of kindness. It has the potential to reshape entire societies, fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and cooperation. When individuals are empowered by this divine love, they become agents of positive change, working tirelessly to create a more just and equitable world.

The profound impact of Christian love is evident throughout history. From the early Christian communities that provided solace and support to the marginalized and oppressed to the countless individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving others. In essence, Christian love is not merely a human emotion but a divine gift that enables individuals to transcend their limitations and become beacons of hope and compassion in a world often characterized by division and conflict.

The Love and Mercy of Divine Delay

The question of why it took so long for God to send Christ has puzzled believers for centuries. Some have argued that God was indifferent to our suffering, while others have suggested that He was simply waiting for the right moment. However, the author of this passage offers a different perspective. He argues that God was actually showing us patience and forbearance during that time.

According to the author, God knew that we could not enter the Kingdom of God on our own. We are too sinful and corrupt. So He chose to wait until we had reached a point of desperation. He allowed evil to increase in the world so that we would see the futility of our own efforts to save ourselves. During this time, God was also teaching us through experience. He was showing us that we need Him. We need His forgiveness, His grace, and His love. And we need His help to overcome our sinfulness.

“In His mercy, He took up the burden of our sins. He himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us – the holy one for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, the righteous one for the unrighteous, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else could cover our sins except his righteousness.”

Finally, when the time was right, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins. He took our place and paid the penalty that we deserved. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus made it possible for us to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Nothing else could cover our sins except for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He was the only one who was holy enough, innocent enough, and righteous enough to pay the price for our sins.

In His mercy, God took up the burden of our sins and sent His Son to die in our place. This is the greatest act of love that has ever been known. And it is a love that is available to each and every one of us.

Invitation Not Just Appeal

The author of the letter goes beyond merely seeking toleration for Christians to exist peacefully. Instead, he extends an invitation to his pagan audience, urging them to embark on a journey of discovering and accepting the profound love of the Father. The letter encourages readers to contemplate the immense joy and love they will experience upon recognizing that God loved them first. “Think with what joy you will be filled! Think how you will love him, who first loved you so!” Through this personal connection with God, the author presents a transformative hope: the opportunity for readers to become imitators of God's divine nature.

By knowing God, the author suggests that readers can transcend their human limitations and embody the qualities of love and compassion that define God's character. This process of imitation is not merely about adhering to a set of rules or commandments but rather about aligning one's heart, mind, and actions with God's loving nature. The author invites readers to surrender their lives to this process, recognizing that it is through this intimate connection with God that they can truly flourish and experience the fullness of life.

Ultimately, the author's invitation is a call to embrace a life defined by love and purpose. By accepting God's love and choosing to imitate his divine nature, readers can become agents of transformation in their communities, spreading love, kindness, and compassion wherever they go; and thus receiving a taste of heaven. This transformative process has the potential to create a ripple effect, inspiring others to seek a deeper connection with God and to live lives that reflect his love and grace.

“On the contrary he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbour; he who, in whatsoever respect he may be superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who receive [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God. Then you shall see, while still on earth, that God in the heavens rules over [the universe]; then you shall begin to speak the mysteries of God; then shall you both love and admire those that suffer punishment because they will not deny God; then shall you condemn the deceit and error of the world when you shall know what it is to live truly in heaven, when you shall despise that which is here esteemed to be death, when you shall fear what is truly death, which is

reserved for those who shall be condemned to the eternal fire, which shall afflict those even to the end that are committed to it.”



Review Questions

1. Who wrote this letter? (A: The author is unknown.)
2. What does the letter discuss? (A: It is a defense/explanation (apology) of the faith.)
3. What is free will defined as? (A: It is how God cares enough to respect human freedom since God doesn't force Himself on us.)
4. In the letter, how does the author define Christian love? (A: It is described by the ability for Christians to love by explaining that we're driven by the supernatural power of God.)
5. What took God so long to send us Christ? (A: God was actually showing us patience and forbearance. Teaching us through experience that we can not enter the Kingdom of God on our own but that we really need Him.)



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 evenly spaced lines.



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- PATR04 - The Cappadocian Fathers - Intro and Saint Basil.pptx
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Letters

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