

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

I. Greek Fathers

A. Athanasius of Alexandria

1. Much-exiled bishop of Alexandria
2. Writings
 - a. *On the Incarnation*
 - b. Writings against Arians\
 - c. *Life of Anthony*
 - 1) Helped popularize the growing monastic movement, which became a sort of “alternate martyrdom” after Constantine’s toleration
 - 2) Reflects the false asceticism that was increasingly affecting the church.
3. Poles of his theology: Monotheism and salvation
 - a. His Logic
 - 1) Sin involves the destruction of creation
 - 2) Therefore a re-creation is necessary
 - 3) Only God can do this re-creation.
 - b. Not as speculative as many Alexandrians
 - c. Arguments against Arianism
 - 1) Arianism approaches polytheism
 - 2) Arianism ascribes salvation to a creature
 - 3) If Christ is a creature, why worship Him?
4. Key to soteriology: Necessity of a divine savior
 - a. At the heart of his position was the insistence that only if Christ were fully God could He save from sin
 - b. Weaknesses
 - 1) Olson says he is strong on the need of a divine Savior but weak on the exact nature of that Savior
 - 2) Gonzalez says he is weak on terminology, leaving precise and consistent use of vocabulary to the Cappadocians
5. Athanasian Creed
 - a. Credited wrongly to Athanasius Creed, actually medieval in origin
 - b. Although not his, it does reflect the emphases of his theology

B. Three Cappadocians

1. Basil of Caesarea (the Great)
 - a. Bishop of Caesarea (370-79)
 - b. Works
 - 1) *Against Eunomium* (against Arian teaching)
 - 2) *On the Holy Spirit*
 - c. Theological Contribution
 - 1) Began the Cappadocian contribution stressing three hypostases in one essence
 - 2) Noted for his contribution to understanding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; stressed the personality of the Spirit & that He was not a creature; helped raise issue of the Spirit between Nicea and Constantinople
 - d. Monastic rule
2. Gregory of Nyssa
 - a. Brother of Basil; bishop of Nyssa at Basil’s urging but was not adept at it

- b. Practiced “apophatic theology,” i.e., “negative theology,” i.e., God is so transcendent that He can be defined only by what He is not (e.g., infinite, not limited)
 - 3. Gregory of Nazianzus
 - a. Close friend of Basil (fellow students at Athens) but of more retiring disposition
 - b. Defined *hypostasis* as “relation” more than just “person” (The Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, the Spirit proceeds)
 - c. Stressed *theosis*, that God became man that we might become God (to quote Athanasius); i.e., we do not become sons of God in the way Christ is, but our humanity becomes like His perfect humanity—believers become what Christ is, what God intended man to be
 - d. Insisted on real humanity for salvation: “What has not been assumed has not been healed.”
 - C. Eusebius of Caesarea
 - 1. “Father of Church History” (because he was first but also because of new approach—history not “past politics” and wars but theology)
 - 2. Bishop of Caesarea, leader of Trinitarian middle party, admirer of Constantine
 - 3. Writings
 - a. *Ecclesiastical History* (invaluable for what it preserves; a sourcebook)
 - b. *Life of Constantine*
 - c. Apologetics (particularly the OT as preparation for the gospel)
 - 4. Characteristics of His History
 - a. History as a struggle between God and Satan (e.g., Heresy is Satan’s way of thwarting God.)
 - b. Historical triumphalism: Progress from small beginnings to Roman triumph. It is almost as though Constantine is establishing the kingdom of God on earth.
 - c. Opposed premillennialism
 - 1) Admirer of Origen—probably took anti-premillennial stance from him
 - 2) Optimistic in outlook
 - 3) Strongly pro-Roman → Ties God’s kingdom to “Eternal Rome”
 - d. Apostolic succession: Stress on succession of bishops as badge of orthodoxy
 - D. John Chrysostom
 - 1. Biography
 - a. Patriarch of Constantinople (398-404)
 - b. Called “Golden-mouthed” because of his eloquent sermons
 - c. Clashed in Constantinople w/ imperial family
 - d. Died in exile
 - 2. Writings
 - a. 600 expository homilies and some commentaries
 - b. Most quoted of the church fathers
 - c. Grammatical-historical emphasis of Antioch at its best; he had apparently little interest in speculative theology
 - d. Said that heresy results from relying on human reason rather than Scripture
 - e. Approaches Protestantism in seeing Scriptures as the rule of faith (Schaff)
- ## II. Latin Fathers
- A. Ambrose
 - 1. Bishop of Milan

2. Wrote a number of works (*On Faith, On the Holy Spirit*) but were generally simply practical & unoriginal
 3. Talented preacher known for winning Augustine to the Faith
 4. Humbled the emperor Theodosius for slaughtering thousands in Thessalonica by refusing him Holy Communion
 - a. “The emperor was within the church and not over it.”
 - b. Ramifications
 - 1) Some saw this as putting all men under the law of God
 - 2) Others saw the forerunner of the church taking precedence over the state.
- B. Jerome
1. Scholar and translator
 2. Involved in numerous controversies with just about everyone
 3. Promoted monasticism, making a special emphasis on asceticism, especially the glories of virginity
 4. Served as secretary to Pope Damasus and became the pattern for the later office of cardinal
 5. *Illustrious Lives*: Important source on early figures
 6. Greatest contribution: translation of the Bible into Latin, *Vulgate*
- C. Augustine [covered separately]
- D. Gregory the Great
1. “Last of the ancient fathers, first of the medieval doctors.”
 2. Bishop of Rome (590-604), elevated the office of the papacy during a vacuum of power
 3. Influence
 - a. Liturgy and worship (Gregorian chant)
 - b. Missions (Augustine’s mission to England)
 - c. Monasticism (applied Benedict’s rule and established houses)
 4. Approved expression of popular piety
 - a. Veneration of saints, feast days
 - b. Stress on penance
 - 1) Elements: contrition, confession, satisfaction
 - 2) Penance after death was to be done in purgatory
 5. Medieval “interpreter” of Augustine
 - a. Semi-Augustinian/Semi-Pelagian
 - b. Church over state—real creator of the medieval church