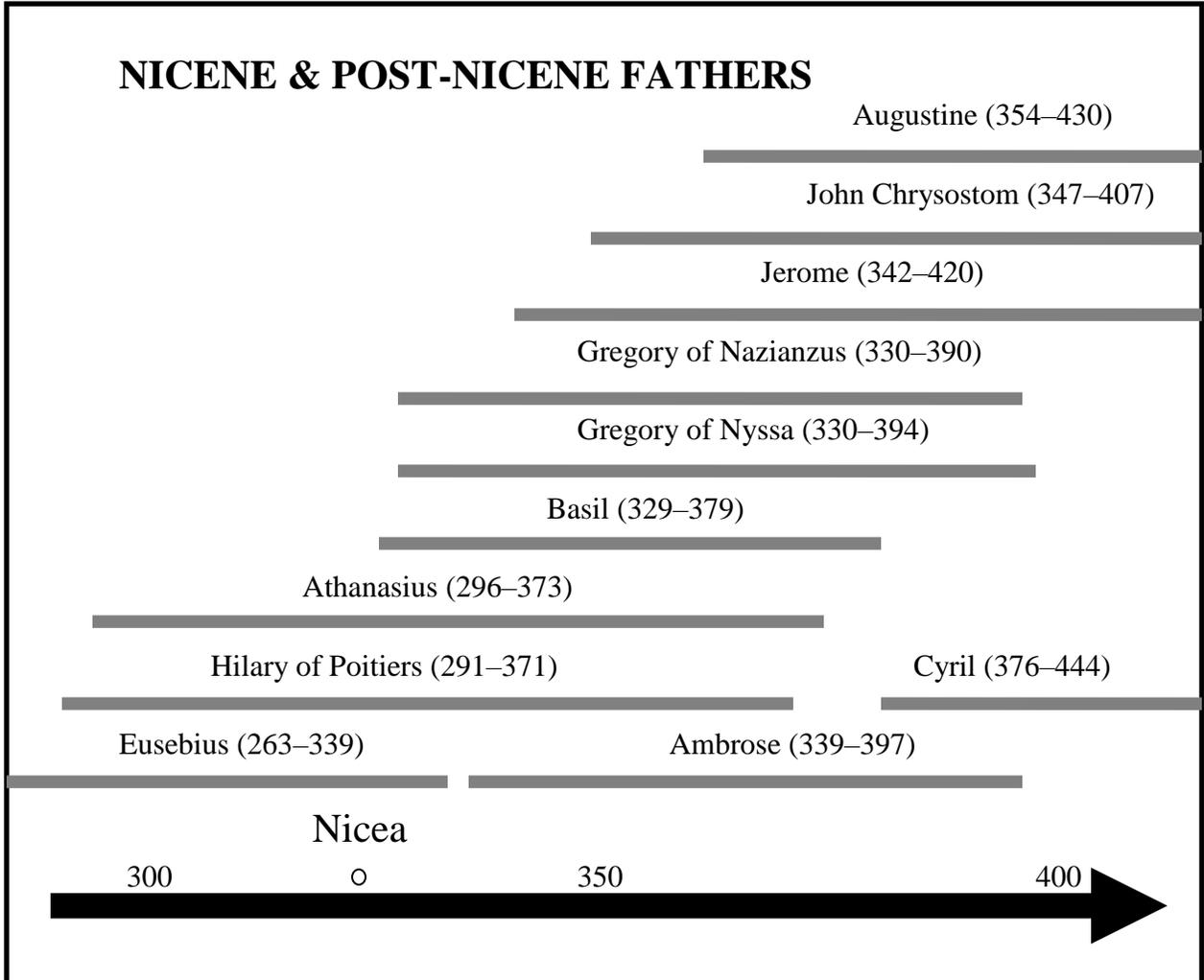


{ LECTURE 10 }

THE NICENE FATHERS
Christian Leaders of the Fourth Century¹



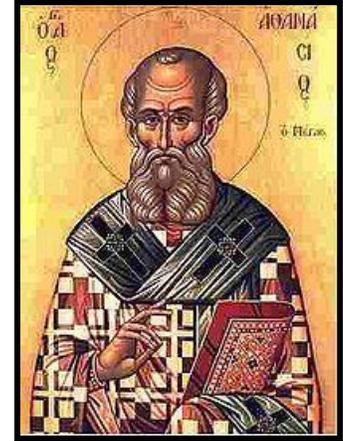
Mark Ellingsen: “Augustine was far from isolated in his greatness during his own lifetime. He was more or less a (younger) contemporary of Athanasius, as well as a full contemporary of the famed preacher Ambrose (ca. 339–97), the bishop of Milan; the equally renowned preacher and bishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407); and the eminent biblical scholar and translator of the Bible Jerome. Another group of famed contemporaries was the Cappadocians: Basil the Great, his sister Macrina (ca. 327–379), their brother Gregory of Nyssa, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus. These four friends/relatives served the Church in the region of eastern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) that bears the

¹ Parts of this lecture were developed from Professor James Stitzinger’s class syllabus.

name of Cappadocia” (*Reclaiming Our Roots* [Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1999], 1.125)

I. Athanasius

- **Athanasius of Alexandria** (c. 296–373) was a Christian bishop, the Patriarch of Alexandria, in the fourth century.
- Primary defender against Arianism (the teaching that Jesus was created by the Father at some point in time); taught that the Son was of identical essence as the Father



His Life

- Born to wealthy parents in Egypt in 296; died 373.
- He was well-educated and influenced by the martyr-mindset of his day.
- Small in stature yet had a keen mind—a skilled theologian and a prolific writer.
- Because of his stand against Arius, he became widely known—he was made a bishop of Alexandria at age 33 when his teacher, Alexander, died.

Bruce L. Shelley: “No career better illustrates the way in which imperial power took over actual control of the church than that of Athanasius. As a young advisor to Alexander, he had won a resounding victory at Nicea over his elderly opponent, Arius. Soon after that, at the age of 33, he succeeded Alexander as bishop of the great see of Alexandria. For the next 50 years, however, no one could predict who would win in the struggle with Arianism. During these decades, Athanasius was banished no less than five times, each banishment and return to Alexandria representing either a change in emperors or a shift in the makeup of the palace ecclesiastical clique that had the emperor’s ear. At times Athanasius was so completely out of imperial favor that he felt deserted by all his supporters. During one such hour he uttered his famous defiance, *Athanasius Against the World*. He would stand alone, if need be, against the whole empire” (*Church History in Plain Language* [Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2008], p. 103).

Made Bishop in 328

Exiled 336

Restored 337	Exiled 339
Restored 346	Exiled 356
Restored 361	Exiled 362
Restored 363	Exiled 365
Restored 366	Died 373

S. M. Houghton: “Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, in Egypt, openly disputed the divinity of Christ, asserting that Christ was a created being, and thousands followed him in his errors. To combat this heresy God raised up Athanasius, also of Alexandria, who wrote a famous book entitled *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, in which he defended the true biblical doctrine of the Person of Christ. He is remembered by the saying, ‘Athanasius contra mundum’ (Athanasius against the world), meaning that even if he were the sole upholder of the truth, he would be prepared to defend it against all its opponents” (*Sketches from Church History*, p. 21).

His Writings

- Though he was only a deacon at the time of the Council of Nicea (325), Athanasius spent most of the fourth century fighting Arius. He argued strongly in favor of the Eternal Sonship of Christ (included deity) as well as the doctrine of the Trinity; against Arius' denial of both.
- Most of his writings have survived and comprise either Biblical commentaries or doctrinal works. Subjects discussed include Creation, the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Work of Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- Athanasius remained the focal point of Arian attack even after his death. Though he did not live to see Arianism finally defeated, his efforts were greatly used by God to keep the church from heresy.

John Piper: “This was the war Athanasius fought for forty-five years. It lasted all his life, but the orthodox outcome was just over the horizon when he died in 373. And under God this outcome was owing to the courage and constancy and work and writing of Athanasius. No one comes close to his influence in the cause of biblical truth during his lifetime” (*Contending for Our All* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006], 42–43).

- When Athanasius died in 373, there was plenty of momentum to uphold Nicene orthodoxy. The Cappadocian fathers were already in their 40s, Ambrose and Jerome in their 30s, Chrysostom in his

late 20s, and Augustine (who was not yet converted) in his late teens.

The Athanasian Creed

- Likely penned by Ambrose of Milan

(1) Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [universal] faith; (2) Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. (3) And the catholic [universal] faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; (4) Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. (5) For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. (6) But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. (7) Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. (8) The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. (9) The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. (10) The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. (11) And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal. (12) As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. (13) So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. (14) And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. (15) So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; (16) And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. (17) So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; (18) And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. (19) For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; (20) So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords. (21) The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. (22) The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. (23) The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. (24) So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. (25) And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. (26) But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. (27) So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. (28) He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity. (29) Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (30) For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. (31) God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world. (32) Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. (33) Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as

touching His manhood. (34) Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. (35) One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God. (36) One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. (37) For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; (38) Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; (39) He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty; (40) From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. (41) At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; (42) and shall give account of their own works. (43) And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. (44) This is the catholic [universal] faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

Athanasius on the Death of Arius (Letter LIV, To Serapion)

Athanasius to Serapion, a brother and fellow-minister, health in the Lord.

I have read the letters of your piety, in which you have requested me to make known to you the events of my times relating to myself, and to give an account of that most impious heresy of the Arians, in consequence of which I have endured these sufferings, and also of the manner of the death of Arius. With two out of your three demands I have readily undertaken to comply . . . but with respect to the other matter, I mean the death, I debated with myself for a long time, fearing lest anyone should suppose that I was exulting in the death of that man. But yet, since a disputation which has taken place amongst you concerning the heresy, has issued in this question, whether Arius died after previously communicating with the Church; I therefore was necessarily desirous of giving an account of his death, as thinking that the question would thus be set at rest, considering also that by making this known I should at the same time silence those who are fond of contention. For I conceive that when the wonderful circumstances connected with his death become known, even those who before questioned it will no longer venture to doubt that the Arian heresy is hateful in the sight of God.

I was not at Constantinople when he died, but Macarius the Presbyter was, and I heard the account of it from him. Arius had been invited by the Emperor Constantine, through the interest of Eusebius [of Nicomedia] and his fellows; and when he entered the presence the Emperor enquired of him, whether he held the Faith of the Catholic Church? And he declared upon oath that he held the right Faith, and gave in an account of his Faith in writing, suppressing the points for which he had been cast out of the Church by the Bishop Alexander, and speciously alleging expressions out of the Scriptures. When therefore he swore that he did not profess the opinions for which Alexander had excommunicated him, [the Emperor] dismissed him, saying, 'If thy Faith be right, thou hast done well to swear; but if thy Faith be impious, and thou hast sworn, God judge of thee according to thy oath.' When he thus came forth from the presence of the Emperor, Eusebius and his fellows, with their accustomed violence, desired to

bring him into the Church. But Alexander, the Bishop of Constantinople of blessed memory, resisted them, saying that the inventor of the heresy ought not to be admitted to communion; whereupon Eusebius and his fellows threatened, declaring, 'As we have caused him to be invited by the Emperor, in opposition to your wishes, so to-morrow, though it be contrary to your desire, Arius shall have communion with us in this Church.' It was the Sabbath when they said this.

When the Bishop Alexander heard this, he was greatly distressed, and entering into the church, he stretched forth his hands unto God, and bewailed himself; and casting himself upon his face in the chancel, he prayed, lying upon the pavement. Macarius also was present, and prayed with him, and heard his words. And he besought these two things, saying, 'If Arius is brought to communion to-morrow, let me Thy servant depart, and destroy not the pious with the impious; but if Thou wilt spare Thy Church (and I know that Thou wilt spare), look upon the words of Eusebius and his fellows, and give not thine inheritance to destruction and reproach, and take off Arius, lest if he enter into the Church, the heresy also may seem to enter with him, and henceforward impiety be accounted for piety.' When the Bishop had thus prayed, he retired in great anxiety; and a wonderful and extraordinary circumstance took place. While Eusebius and his fellows threatened, the Bishop prayed; but Arius, who had great confidence in Eusebius and his fellows, and talked very wildly, urged by the necessities of nature withdrew, and suddenly, in the language of Scripture, 'falling headlong he burst asunder in the midst,' and immediately expired as he lay, and was deprived both of communion and of his life together.

Such has been the end of Arius: and Eusebius and his fellows, overwhelmed with shame, buried their accomplice, while the blessed Alexander, amidst the rejoicings of the Church, celebrated the Communion with piety and orthodoxy, praying with all the brethren, and greatly glorifying God, not as exulting in his death (God forbid!), for 'it is appointed unto all men once to die,' but because this thing had been shown forth in a manner transcending human judgments. For the Lord Himself judging between the threats of Eusebius and his fellows, and the prayer of Alexander, condemned the Arian heresy, showing it to be unworthy of communion with the Church, and making manifest to all, that although it receive the support of the Emperor and of all mankind, yet it was condemned by the Church herself. So the antichristian gang of the Arian madmen has been shown to be displeasing to God and impious; and many of those who before were deceived by it changed their opinions. For none other than the Lord Himself who was blasphemed by them condemned the heresy which rose up against Him, and again showed that howsoever the Emperor Constantius may now use violence to the Bishops in behalf of it, yet it is excluded from the communion of the Church, and alien from the kingdom of heaven. Wherefore also let the question which has arisen among you be henceforth set at rest; (for this was the agreement made among you), and let no one join himself to the heresy, but let even those who have been deceived repent. For who shall receive what the Lord condemned? And will not he who takes up the support of that which He has made excommunicate, be guilty of great impiety, and manifestly an enemy of Christ?

II. The Cappadocian Fathers

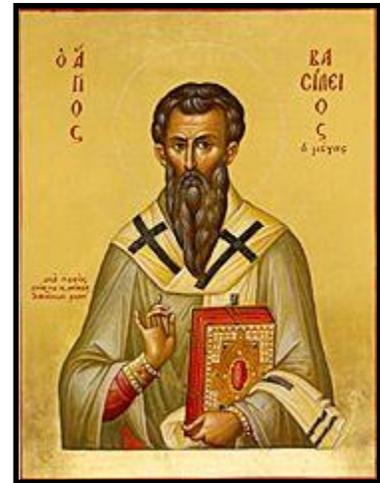
- The Cappadocian Fathers include Basil of Caesarea (330–79); Gregory of Nyssa, Basil’s brother (335–94); and Gregory of Nazianzus, a close friend (330–390)
- These three Christian leaders were instrumental in reclaiming many who had been impacted by Arianism. They ministered in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), where Arianism had continued to spread even after the Council of Nicaea.

Basil of Caesarea:

H. Dermot McDonald: “In 364 Basil was ordained presbyter and in the spring of 370 he succeeded Eusebius as bishop of Caesarea [Philippi]. His new monastery was at the heart of the complex of hospitals and hostels he founded, largely out of his own pocket, out of his concern for the sick and needy. He took a firm stand against the state-supported Arian party, and wrote several works to oppose their errors. . . . By giving precise meanings to the terms used in talking about the Trinity, Basil paved the way for the work of the Council of Constantinople in 381. He was the first to fix the accepted formula for the Trinity: one *substance (ousia)* and three persons (*hypostaseis*)” (*Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], 175).

In his own words (regarding the Holy Spirit):

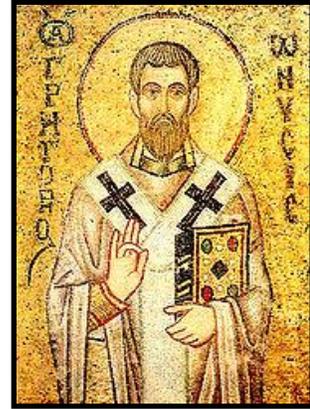
Let us then examine the points one by one. He [the Holy Spirit] is good by nature, in the same way as the Father is good, and the Son is good; the creature on the other hand shares in goodness by choosing the good. He knows “The deep things of God;” [2 Cor. 3:17] the creature [by contrast] receives the manifestation of ineffable things through the Spirit. He quickens together with God, who produces and preserves all things alive, and together with the Son, who gives life. “He that raised up Christ from the dead,” it is said, “shall also quicken your mortal bodies by the spirit that dwells in you;” [1 Cor. 2:10, 11] and again “my sheep hear my voice, ... and I give unto them eternal life;” but Spirit” also, it is said, “gives life,” [Rom. 8:11] and again “the Spirit,” it is said, “is life, because of righteousness.” [John 10:27–28] And the Lord bears witness that “it is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing.” [2 Cor. 3:6] How then shall we alienate the Spirit from His quickening power, and make Him belong to lifeless nature? Who is so contentious, who is so utterly without the heavenly gift, [Rom. 8:10] and unfed by God’s good words, who is so devoid of part and lot in eternal hopes, as to sever the Spirit from the Godhead and rank Him with the creature? (*On the Spirit*, 24.56).



Gregory of Nyssa:

In his own words (regarding the Trinity):

They charge us with preaching three Gods, and din into the ears of the multitude this slander, which they never rest from maintaining persuasively. Then truth fights on our side, for we show both publicly to all men, and privately to those who converse with us, that we anathematize any man who says that there are three Gods, and hold him to be not even a Christian. Then, as soon as they hear this, they find Sabellius a handy weapon against us, and the plague that he spread is the subject of continual attacks upon us. . . . Now they charge us with innovation, and frame their complaint against us in this way:—They allege that while we confess three Persons we say that there is one goodness, and one power, and one Godhead. And in this assertion they do not go beyond the truth; for we do say so. But the ground of their complaint is that their custom does not admit this, and Scripture does not support it. What then is our reply? We do not think that it is right to make their prevailing custom the law and rule of sound doctrine. For if custom is to avail for proof of soundness, we too, surely, may advance our prevailing custom; and if they reject this, we are surely not bound to follow theirs. Let the inspired Scripture, then, be our umpire, and the vote of truth will surely be given to those whose dogmas are found to agree with the Divine words. (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity, and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit*, Letter to Eustathius)



Gregory of Nazianzus

In his own words (regarding the deity of Christ):

For we have learnt to believe in and to teach the Deity of the Son from their great and lofty utterances. And what utterances are these? These: God—The Word—He That Was In The Beginning and With The Beginning, and The Beginning. “In the Beginning was The Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” [John 1:1] and “With Thee is the Beginning,” [Psalm 110:3] and “He who calls her The Beginning from generations.” [Isaiah 61:4] Then the Son is Only-begotten: The only “begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, it says, He hath declared Him.” [John 1:18] The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;” and “I am the Light of the World.” [John 7:12; 9:5; 14:6] Wisdom and Power, “Christ, the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God.” [1 Cor. 1:24] The Effulgence, the Impress, the Image, the Seal; “Who being the Effulgence of His glory and the



Impress of His Essence,” [Heb. 1:3] and “the Image of His Goodness,” and “Him hath God the Father sealed.” [John 6:27] Lord, King, He That Is, The Almighty. “The Lord rained down fire from the Lord; “ [Gen 19:24] and “A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy Kingdom;” [Psalm 45:6] and “Which is and was and is to come, the Almighty” [Rev. 1:8] —all which are clearly spoken of the Son, with all the other passages of the same force, none of which is an afterthought, or added later to the Son or the Spirit, any more than to the Father Himself. For Their Perfection is not affected by additions. There never was a time when He was without the Word, or when He was not the Father, or when He was not true, or not wise, or not powerful, or devoid of life, or of splendor, or of goodness. (*Oration XXIX*, sect. XVII)

III. Ambrose of Milan (339–397)

His Life

- Born in 339 at Trier, died in 397.
- Practiced in the Roman law-courts and in 370 became governor of Aemilia-Liguria.
- In 374, he became Bishop of Milan. He did not seek to be nominated as a bishop, but was simply trying to arbitrate the process of finding a new one. The people, when they couldn’t agree on anyone else, asked Ambrose to take the position.
- At this time, he was baptized and ordained (in only 8 days). He also devoted himself to the study of theology.
- He was partly responsible for the conversion of Augustine.
- He was an outstanding preacher and a staunch upholder of orthodoxy.



His Writings

- Most of his writings were defenses of Christian ethics and morality against Paganism and Arianism.
- The rest of his writings were sermons on instructions given to candidate for baptism, etc.
- He also advocated the separation of church and state; standing against the increasing influence of imperial control on the Christian church.
- He wrote some Latin hymns and many attribute the Athanasian Creed to his pen.

In his own words (defending the Trinity):

Now this is the declaration of our Faith, that we say that God is One, neither dividing His Son from Him, as do the heathen, nor denying, with the Jews, that He was begotten of the Father before all worlds, and afterwards born of the Virgin; nor yet, like Sabellius, confounding the Father with the Word, and so maintaining that Father and Son are one and the same Person; nor again, as doth Photinus, holding that the Son first came into existence in the Virgin's womb: nor believing, with Arius, in a number of diverse Powers, and so, like the benighted heathen, making out more than one God. For it is written: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord thy God is one God." . . .

If, then, God is One, one is the name, one is the power, of the Trinity. Christ Himself, indeed, saith: "Go ye, baptize the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." [Matt. 28:19] In the *name*, mark you, not in the *names*."

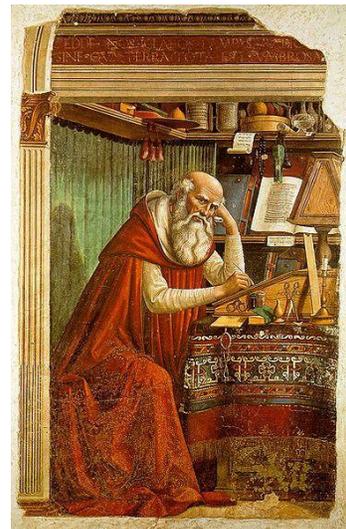
Moreover, Christ Himself saith: "I and the Father are One." [John 10:30] "One," said He, that there be no separation of power and nature; but again, "*We are*," that you may recognize Father and Son, forasmuch as the perfect Father is believed to have begotten the perfect Son, [Matt. 5:48] and the Father and the Son are One, not by confusion of Person, but by unity of nature.

We say, then, that there is one God, not two or three Gods, this being the error into which the impious heresy of the Arians doth run with its blasphemies. For it says that there are three Gods, in that it divides the Godhead of the Trinity; whereas the Lord, in saying, "Go, baptize the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," hath shown that the Trinity is of one power. We confess Father, Son, and Spirit, understanding in a perfect Trinity both fullness of Divinity and unity of power. (*Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 1.1.6–10)

IV. Jerome (342–420)

His Life

- Born at Stridon in Dalmatia in 342. Studied at Rome, travelled in Gaul and then took up an ascetic life at Aquileia.
- He had an extensive library and enjoyed reading both the Bible and the Roman classics, especially Cicero. (At one point, he had a dream where his love of Cicero was confronted as being greater than his love for Scripture.)



- He set out for Palestine, settling in the Syrian desert for 4–5 years (a hermit) and there learned Hebrew. He was one of the few to learn Hebrew at this time. Not even Augustine knew Hebrew. Augustine felt the LXX was sufficient.
- He then returned to Rome to teach asceticism for some time and returned to Bethlehem in 386 to preside over a men's monastery. He had a reputation for being easily irritated and difficult to get along with.

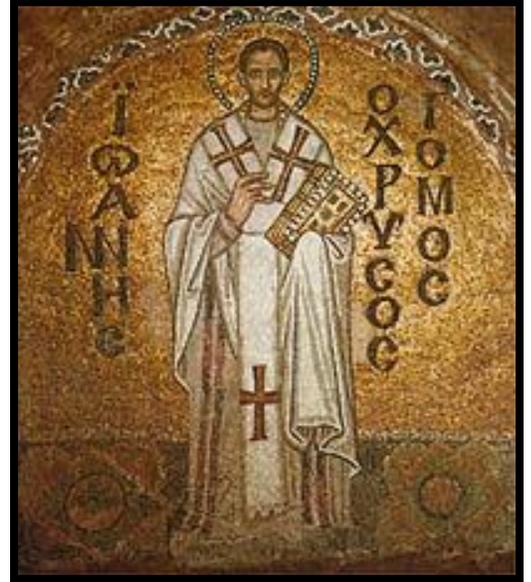
His Writings

- Jerome's scholarship was unsurpassed in the early Church.
- His greatest accomplishment was his translation of the Bible into Latin (Vulgate, meaning, “language of the people”) from the original languages (383-405). This he did at the request of Damasus, Bishop of Rome—a monumental work.
- Jerome's Vulgate included the apocryphal books as they were in the Septuagint. However, he agreed to this compromise over personal objections.
- **Key Quote (regarding the Apocrypha)** “As then the Church reads Judith, Tobit and the books of Maccabees, but does not admit them among the canonical Scriptures, so let it read these two volumes (Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus) for the edification of the people, not to give authority to doctrines of the Church.” (*Preface to Jerome's Works*, p. 492)
- Jerome also wrote many Biblical commentaries (strong in linguistic/topographical information); and contributed to the doctrinal discussions which raged during his day (e.g. Arius and Pelagianism.)
- On the positive side, Jerome emphasized the exegetical study of Scripture and the importance of Christ-centered preaching. On the negative side, Jerome overemphasized the merits of celibacy including the perpetual virginity of Mary.

V. John Chrysostom (347–407)

His Life

- 347–407 Bishop of Constantinople and "Doctor of the Church"
- He studied law under Libanius of Antioch and Theology under Diodore of Tarsus (Antiochene School).
- Friend of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who stressed grammatical-historical context for interpretation of Scripture and opposed allegorization.
- He desired monastic life and became a hermit which damaged his health.
- He became a deacon in 381, a priest in 386, and a bishop (patriarch) in 398.



His Writings

- During 386-98 while a priest, he became known as "golden mouthed" due to his ability to preach and his great powers of oratory.
- He delivered series of "Homilies" on Genesis, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Ephesians, Timothy and Titus. He was known as the greatest of Christian expositors—these are preserved. (He is known more as a preacher than as a theologian. This is in contrast to Augustine who held to a more allegorical hermeneutic, and is known more as a theologian.)
- He was against allegorical exegesis and insisted on literal interpretation.
- His honesty, asceticism, and tactlessness did not always win him friendship with other bishops. This led to false charges of doctrinal heresy and his removal as bishop. His continued openness about his beliefs led to his exile to Antioch which even the people of Constantinople and the Bishop of Rome (Innocent I) could not stop. This was not enough punishment and he was forced to travel on foot in winter weather causing his death.

- His chief contributions include his preaching, his exegesis, his liturgical reforms, and his personal holiness.
- **Key Quote on Expository Preaching:** “For we ought to unlock the passage by first giving a clear interpretation of the words. What then does the saying mean? . . . We must not attend to the words merely, but turn our attention to the sense, and learn the aim of the speaker, and the cause and the occasion, and by putting all these things together turn out the hidden meaning.” (*Against Marcionists and Manichaens*, Section 1)

In his own words (exposition on Romans 4:1–2):

He [the Apostle Paul] had said that the world had become guilty before God, and that all had sinned, and that boasting was excluded and that it was impossible to be saved otherwise than by faith. . . . For a person who had no works, to be justified by faith, was nothing unlikely. But for a person [like Abraham] richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from hence, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder, and to set the power of faith in a strong light. And this is why he passes by all the others, and leads his discourse back to this man. And he calls him “father, as pertaining to the flesh,” to throw them out of the genuine relationship to him, and to pave the Gentiles’ way to kinsmanship with him. And then he says, “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory: but not before God.” After saying that God “justified the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith,” and making the same sufficiently sure in what he said before, he now proves it by Abraham more clearly than he promised, and pitches the battle for faith against works.

(on Romans 11:6)

Why then are you afraid of drawing nigh, since you have no works demanded of you? Why are you bickering and quarrelsome, when grace is before you, and why keep putting me the Law forward to no purpose whatsoever? For you will not be saved by that, and will mar this gift also; since if you pertinaciously insist on being saved by it, you do away with this grace of God. Then that they might not think this strange, having first taken those seven thousand; he said that they were saved by grace. For when he says, “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace;” he shows that they also were saved by grace. And not hereby only, but likewise by saying, “I have reserved unto Myself.” For this is the language of One Who shows that He Himself was the chief Contributor. And if by grace, it will be said, how came we all not

to be saved? Because ye would not. For grace, though it be grace, saves the willing, not those who will not have it, and turn away from it, who persist in fighting against it, and opposing themselves to it. . . . And here again he confirms it another way, and shows the force of grace, and that always the one were being saved, the other perished. Let us then give thanks, that we belong to them that are being saved, and not having been able to save ourselves by works, were saved by the gift of God. But in giving thanks, let us not do this in words only, but in works and actions. For this is the genuine thanksgiving, when we do those things whereby God is sure to be glorified, and flee from those from which we have been set free.

VI. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

His Life

- Born to a Christian mother, named Monica. His father would come to Christ through Monica's testimony. Monica also became a major spiritual influence on her son. She prayed deeply (with tears) and consistently for her son's conversion.
- Augustine became a student of rhetoric and a teacher of literature, oratory and philosophy.
- Extremely worldly early life. We know this because of his *Confessions*, which emphasize the sinfulness of his youth.
- He lived for 14 years with a woman out of wedlock and had an illegitimate son, Adeodatus, who lived 13 years.
- He joined the Manichaean heresy and became an ascetic.



Stephen J. Nichols: “If we were to look in on Augustine's life at certain times, however, we would be quite surprised to find out that the one we were observing would become the towering figure of church history. In his early adulthood, he's running from God. The Scriptures lack rhetorical punch for him, the work of the theologians leaves him intellectually unsatisfied, and a Christian ethic imposes far too much restriction on him—especially when he looks upon his mistress. Christianity is both too much and not enough for Augustine. This despite the lifelong prayers and pleas of his saintly mother, Monica.

Augustine himself would agree with our surprise. In fact, he would state it much more starkly. . . . Herein is Augustine's story. It is the story of the Hound of Heaven—Augustine applied that term to God with the utmost reverence—tracking him down” (*Pages from Church History* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006] pp. 66–67)

- Factors leading to his conversion:
 - Constant prayers of his mother.
 - Conversion of a friend, Victorinus.
 - Testimony of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and a preacher.
 - Exhortation from his friend, Allochus, to read his Bible.
 - One day, while walking, he heard a child say, "pick it up and read it." He opened his Bible to Romans 13:13-14 and was saved (386 AD).
 - He and Allochus were baptized on Easter Sunday, 387, by Ambrose. Augustine would have been in his early 30s.

His Teachings

- Most influential of the fathers of the western church.
- After 396, he became the Bishop of Hippo (Africa) where he continued until his death. Hippo Regius is modern day Annaba, Algeria.
- He is known for many things including his great spirituality.
- Among his significant works are his *Confessions of St. Augustine* (397–400) and his *City of God*. The latter is a defense of Christians who were accused of sacking Rome in 410.
- His writings are voluminous and massively influenced almost every sphere of Western thought. His writings develop a Christian philosophy of history and formulate doctrinal positions which became the basis of controversy.

Stephen J. Nichols: “That Augustine would come to be such a central figure is due to the fact that he wrote so broadly and so early. He did not coin the term *Trinity*. Tertullian takes that honor. But Augustine was the first, apart from the revelation of the Trinitarian doctrine by Scripture’s authors, to offer the fullest treatment of it and the most enduring arguments for it. He expressed this in his work *On the Trinity*, ten years in the making. He also offered one of the first fully developed and truly Christian philosophies of history and of society. This shines through in his work *The City of God*, another lengthy project that entailed thirteen years” (*Pages from Church History*, 68–69).

- With respect to the doctrines of grace, Augustine’s teaching is significant:

In the writings of Augustine, one finds all five points of later Calvinist development including, Total Depravity, Absolute Predestination, Particular Redemption, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. It is not possible, however, to tell from Augustine's writings that he believed in single or double predestination.

- Disputes with Pelagius
 - A very significant controversy involving the simple monk Pelagius (354–415)
 - Pelagius held several important views:
 - Adam was created with free will (“the image of God”)—the ability to choose.
 - Adam's fall made only himself a sinner—not depraved.
 - All children are born as Adam was before the fall—no original sin.
 - The human race does not die in consequence of Adam's fall – denying the noetic effects of sin.
 - The law as well as the gospel leads to heaven—salvation by works.
- Out of this came:

- **Augustinianism** - emphasizing the depravity of human nature due to the sin of Adam, the necessity of divine predestination, and the priority of faith over reason.
- **Pelagianism** - emphasizes human ability and free will rather than depravity and sinfulness, even the possibility of living without sin. The effects of Adam's sin upon his descendants was simply that of a bad example.
- **Semi-Pelagianism** - a middle position emphasizing that faith begins independently of God's grace, although such grace is subsequently necessary for salvation. A position including Catholics and Arminianism. The view was set forth in the 5th and 6th centuries and the name coined in the 16th century.
 - Augustine opposed Pelagius by saying man is depraved, has original sin, is saved by grace, and that the fall included all men. His views on Predestination likely grew out of his controversy with Pelagius.
 - A synod at Antioch in 424 barred Pelagius from Palestine.

In his own words (regarding Total Depravity):

Man's nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin; but that nature of man in which everyone is born from Adam, now wants the Physician, because it is not sound. All good qualities, no doubt, which it still possesses in its make, life, senses, intellect, it has of the Most High God, its Creator and Maker. But the flaw, which darkens and weakens all those natural goods, so that it has need of illumination and healing, it has not contracted from its blameless Creator—but from that original sin, which it committed by free will. Accordingly, criminal nature has its part in most righteous punishment. For, if we are now newly created in Christ, we were, for all that, children of wrath, even as others, “but God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by whose grace we were saved.” (*On Nature and Grace, against Pelagius*, chapter 3)

In his own words (from his *Confessions*):

Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You, man, who bears about with him his mortality, the

witness of his sin, even the witness that You “resist the proud,” —yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You Lord. . . . And those who seek the Lord shall praise Him. For those who seek shall find Him, and those who find Him shall praise Him. Let me seek You, Lord, in calling on You, and call on You in believing in You; for You have been preached unto us. O Lord, my faith calls on You,—that faith which You have imparted to me, which You have breathed into me through the incarnation of Your Son, through the ministry of Your preacher (*Confessions*, 1.1).