

PART III

Christianity thru the Middle Ages

(Chapters 11 - 15)



The Rise Of Christianity

If there were some meat to this work, then we might say that we have reached the meat of this subject. As it is, we must settle for appetizer ahead. But as is always the case, before we get to any meat let us chew on the bone. When one looks at the nature of Christianity, one must understand its bones.

Judaism At The Time Of Jesus

While there are some who would argue the depth or even the correctness or application of the connection, it is impossible to deny that Judaism is the root and trunk of Christianity. Basic understandings are underpinned with traditional Hebrew ideas and scripture, at least as it stood in the 1st century. Judaism is a religion of richness and depth which unfortunately will not be plumbed here. Our ultimate goal is to understand Christianity and so much here may be left to be desired. As we have somewhat discussed, the practice of Judaism in and around the first century was broad based and dynamic, and cannot be easily categorized. But in an attempt, let us look at it a bit more closely.

Just as we can see in Christianity today, where there are many people trying to interpret the sacred meaning of the revelation which has been supplied, the same dynamics are at work even in modern Judaism. Many cultural and historical influences have been exercised in the last 2000+ years and several groups have arisen, from the ultra-orthodox to the secular Zionists. We can therefore expect little else from any other period of history. We must first remove ourselves from our own time and prejudices as well as our reliance on Scripture's snapshot to paint not just a picture of Faith, but a somewhat more historical record. All that said, let us be reminded of some of those groups and take a high level glance at them.

Pharisees and Sadducees: As we began, we can over-simply state that the Pharisees were the party of the poor and educated, like the scribes who were important to the society but not always socially connected, and that the Sadducees were the party of the priests, the more socially connected religious power-holders. We might want to think of the Pharisees as a 'theological school' and the Sadducees as a 'political party'.

The Pharisees' desire was to purify and strengthen Judaism by explanation. By ridged adherence and practice they would be able to understand the ramifications of the Law as well as the Law itself in everyday life and thereby the faithful could extract themselves from the profane fray and deliver Israel back into God's care. Their aim was to keep the Law in all its details both the *letter and the spirit* of the Law; not so much just the Sinai Covenant 'Law of Moses' with its Decalogue and its 600+ statues but also the countless laws developed and taught by the teachers of the law, the scribes, the rabbinic tradition. You can see how this would fit more into the lives of everyday Jews, the poor and socially stymied – who would spend more time at work and Synagogue than Temple. The Pharisees, contrary to Christian scripture indications were still 'out of favor' at the time of Jesus. By the time the Christian Gospels were written, however, this situation had changed.

The Sadducees concentrated on their priestly heritage, a strategy that used the religious and political structures to gain and retain power. Since they controlled the priesthood (a long-time channel of power and the means of the restoration of Israel after the Exile) they emphasized the Temple and Temple rituals and sacrifices which relied on that priesthood. With this base they had little interest in or need for the developed traditions of the scribes and therefore only acknowledged the written Law of Moses and not the rabbinic traditions. Their power came from the Temple and their willingness to interact with the ruling bodies, whether those were seen as legitimate by everyday Jews or not. The Sadducees had a more direct understanding of Revelation, which pointed mainly to life issues and those only within the

context of the Law. That said they did not believe in the resurrection of the body or that God took an active hand in life's daily events and, following from that, the existence of some sort of angelic beings, all of which were important beliefs to the Pharisees.

The School of Hillel: As mentioned before there were also two main 'schools' of thinking about the Law both developing just before the birth of Jesus. The scholar Shammai (50 BC-30 AD) was concerned that if Jews had too much contact with the Romans, the Jewish community would be weakened, and for this reason he called for a strict interpretation of Jewish law. The scholar Hillel (110 BC-10 AD) did not share Shammai's concerns and therefore had a more liberal view of the Law and its practice. He is most associated with the development of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* and his influence in molding Judaism continued until roughly the fifth century AD. Hillel was recognized as the highest authority among the Pharisees. This means that the rabbis of the Talmud generally favored the rulings of the School of Hillel, though this was not the case in the more conservative early first century with the Temple cult at its height. Because he looked to a broader interpretation of the Law, Hillel's rulings were often based on concern for the day-to-day welfare of individuals which made him very popular with the people. As always, getting a proper judgment was difficult for the poor and powerless and Hillel's attitudes produced fair and desirable results.

So what? Well, Jesus seems to be very attached to Hillel's teachings on the Law, and several aspects of his message seem to be traceable to Hillel's writings. For instance, Hillel considered 'love of man' the kernel of Jewish teaching, if that sounds familiar at all.

Zealots: Some mention has already been made about these anti-Roman rebels who were active for more than sixty years and instigated the 'Great Revolt' about 66 AD which eventually resulted in the destruction of the Temple. Their most basic belief was that the ends justified the means meaning that all means were justified to attain what was in their opinion political and religious liberty. Naturally, this sort of behavior did not endear them to the Jewish leadership, who pretty much gave them no support, hoping that Israel would be spared if they distanced themselves from the rebels. Naturally this lack of support did not endear the leadership to the Zealots but they took a decidedly different route, often assassinating anyone they felt associated with or collaborated with Rome, i.e. who opposed them. In their theology, the Zealots were relatively close to the Pharisees, but their doctrines had a strong focus on the necessity of violent actions against any 'enemies' of Judaism because foreign rule or domination of Judah was wrong. Judah could only be ruled according to the principles and the authority of God and God alone.

Samaritans: Samaritan origin is shrouded in the past and is, as is to be expected, viewed differently by Jews and Samaritans. Jewish-ish, they prefer to be called 'Israelites' rather than 'Jews' as they claim descent not from *Judah* (the southern kingdom) but from *Israel* (the northern kingdom) specifically the tribes of Joseph and Levi (the 'priestly' tribe) who did not leave in the Babylonian Exile (Israel was already long gone). As the Samaritan Torah tells it, theirs is the true religion of the ancient Israelites, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel. Mount Gerizim, located in west-central Israel, was the original Holy Place of the Israelites from the time that Joshua conquered Canaan after the Exodus and the twelve tribes of Israel settled the Promised Land.¹ Judaism, they assert, is related but has distorted practices and beliefs brought back by those *returning from exile*. As the Jews tell it, at best Samaritans are Jews who intermarried with cultures which were transplanted into northern Israel from a mixture of the people forced there by the Assyrians and in a similar vein adopted customs which were incompatible with true Judaism and are merely centered about the God of Israel.

Whatever the tradition, the split appears to have occurred at some point after the Assyrian conquest of the Israelite Kingdom of Israel in approximately 721 BC. Archaeological excavations at Gerizim indicate that a Samaritan temple was built there in the first half of the 5th century BC showing that

¹ See *Deuteronomy 27:4-13*.

there was a definite differentiation by that point. The temple cult was led by a high priesthood which they claim descended directly from Aaron, Moses' brother and which appears to have lasted into the 17th century AD. That there is a long-standing feud is borne out by stories of tensions between north and south described in the narratives of Genesis about the rivalries among the twelve sons of Jacob. While briefly united under the kingships of David and Solomon, after the split of the northern and southern kingdoms we see a definitive end to any unity with the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judea with its capital Jerusalem.

By the time of Christ, Samaria had become a back-water, only recently restored by the building campaign of Herod. We catch a glimpse into the interaction and sentiments of the Jews and the Samaritans in the pages of the Christian Scriptures:

- When instructing his disciples as to how they should spread the word, Jesus tells them not to visit any Gentile or Samaritan city. (*Matthew 10:5-6*)
- A Samaritan village rejects Jesus' request for hospitality because the villagers did not want to be a part of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a practice which they saw as a violation of the Law of Moses. (*Luke 9:51-53*)
- Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water from Jacob's Well in Sychar. After some banter about the contentions between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus convinces her about his message. On her testimony many of the Samaritans there become followers of Jesus. (*John 4:7-42*)
- The *Parable of the Good Samaritan* where a Samaritan helps a Jew even when other Jews will not. (*Luke 10:30-37*)
- Jesus healed ten lepers, of whom only one returned to praise God, the Samaritan. (*Luke 17:11-19, esp. 17:16*)
- Jesus is dismissed as having any authority because he is from Galilee (Galilee being just north of Samaria). (*John 8:48*)

As a final note, as with everything in history, most of the people involved are just simple, plain, everyday folks. They were Jews who observed the Sabbath, who observed the holidays and the festivals, who made the pilgrimage to Temple, who observed the Jewish food laws, the Jewish rituals, believed in the one God, adhered to the ways to the holy life, and followed the dictates of the Torah in a simple, plain way. Most depended upon tradition and rabbis to guide them and they live out their lives without the drama played out within the other groups, even though they often suffer the consequences of those struggles.

Jewish Political And Religious Structure

We are in the timeframe known as the Second Temple era, due to the fact that the Temple in the time of Jesus was the post exilic rebuilding of Solomon's original Temple by Herod. It is also known as the *Intertestamental Period*, because the end of the Hebrew Scriptures does not immediately flow into the Christian Scriptures (and in fact is a period of about 500 years). In this time period, specific structures have been mandated and put into place that resulted in the structure which we see in the 1st century.

High Priest, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites: At the top of the religious hierarchy are the members of the tribe of Levi, the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people who were responsible for the temple, its day-to-day operation, and most importantly, the sacrifices. Priests were men who descended from Moses' brother Aaron. They had to be men from the tribe of Levi according to specific designation from God and consequentially the religious hierarchy was not open to the other eleven tribes. Levites (members of the tribe of Levi who were not priests) assisted in the practical operation of the temple as guards, musicians, or other ministries required by Temple worship. The office of High Priest was annually rotated from the pool of priests, but in the 1st century, due to their association with political

rulers, members of the family of Annas and Caiaphas were often reappointed. According to the Gospels, it is the high priest/chief priests (often with the scribes and elders, i.e. the Jewish leadership) who are identified as the authorities who opposed Jesus, seek to arrest and kill him, and eventually facilitate his condemnation to death by an appeal to the Roman governor Pilate.²

Scribes: Outside of the tribe of Levi, some men were specially trained in writing and thus influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law, and agents of the rulers. The term 'scribes' is sometimes translated as 'lawyers', but only by Luke; the similar passages in Mark and Matthew have 'scribe'. Since law as the Jews understood it was *The Law*, scribes specialized in the interpretation of the Jewish Law (Torah). Accordingly most of their duties involved writing, e.g. producing legal documents, recording deeds, copying scriptures, teaching people, and other such activities in relation to the Law. So technically, the scribes were not a formal division like the Pharisees or the Sadducees, but often belonged to one group or the other (e.g. "*some scribes who were Pharisees*" in *Mark 2:16; Acts 23:9a*). And while the *Acts of the Apostles* also portrays them as opponents of the early Christians (c.f. *Acts 4:5; 6:12*) there are a few exceptions: some scribes are neutral to Jesus (*Matt 13:52*), some are even praised by Jesus (*Mark 12:28-34*), still others rise to defend Paul (*Acts 23:9*).

Elders: With the centrality of the Temple cult also Jews rely on the tribal/Mosaic practice of selecting a local group of men to support the leader in judicial matters. These 'older men' (*presbyteros*) of a community formed the members of official 'councils' for deciding and mediating in the local community. This Greek term is also used to designate those men who are merely respected by others as wise or as role models. The Christian Scriptures usually portray the Jewish elders in agreement with the scribes and priests in opposition to Jesus.

Within Judaism what we see at this time is a combination of rabbinical (local) and priesthood (national) leadership. As the political connections of the priesthood wane, and eventually are destroyed, it is the more pharisaic/rabbinic style of Judaism which remains, with a distinction between the two forms of spiritual leadership, that of teaching and that of ritual and sacrifice.

The Way

Christianity as we know it today is very different than the community of the 1st century. While many aspects would seem familiar, even those of the Book of Acts, and the Epistles, are filtered through the context of the community of that time. Initially, it flourished in the midst of the existing structure of Judaism, as the initial message was to the Jews of the Roman Empire. We can glimpse the nature of the Jewish community which had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts by Luke: "*Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this*



Figure 1: The Roman Empire

sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, 'Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear

² c.f. *Num 3:6-13; Mark 1:44; Matt 12:4-5; Luke 1:5-23; Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36; Matt 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:12-28; Acts 4:6*

them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”

This is obviously a broad based group, comprised of people who are from what is basically the known world. It speaks to the diversity of the world-wide Jewish population of that day, most likely in thought and practice as well as language, yet they are still Jewish – they still are gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. This fact speaks to the highly controlled nature of Judaism, bound together by the Torah, Tradition, and centered on the Temple. The early Church then also reflects that diversity and wide-spread nature as well as focus. This similarity aids in the spread of its message. We must keep in mind that actually there is no such thing as ‘Christianity’ at this time; the Christian Scriptures refer to the followers of Jesus as ‘disciples’ and the first use of any official term is in Acts 11:26 (from around 70 AD), which states *“it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians”* (Antioch is in what is now modern Turkey), and then only as a reference not an official moniker. So this urges us to look for the earliest secular references, as a source for such statements. Josephus (37 – 100 AD) refers to *“the tribe of Christians, so named from him”* in his history. Tacitus writing near the end of the 1st century (96 or so), identifies ‘Christians’ as the ones blamed by Nero for the Great Fire of Rome though he notes this is not their official name: *“by vulgar appellation [they were] commonly called Christians”* (*Annals*), and in a correspondence of Pliny the Younger with Trajan dated about 112.

The early practitioners were decidedly Jewish, but in time begin to morph. We might think of the connection between say Anglicanism and Methodism. Eventually the message spreads beyond the confines of Judaism and converts to Judaism. Christianity, in a pattern of thinking similar to Taoism, was instead referred to as *‘The Way’*. The *Didache*, an early 2nd century document, refers to the *“two ways,”* *“one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways”*, with the practices described as obviously the ‘way of life’. [*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous by faith will live.”* (*Romans 1:16-17*)]

[*“We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with you. But with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; As though it were burnt offerings of rams and bulls, or tens of thousands of fat lambs, so let our sacrifice be in your presence today and find favor before you.... And now we follow you with our whole heart, we fear you and we seek your face....”* (*Daniel 3:38-41*)]

The Guardrails

There is therefore a context and a structure for these teachings. And because of the link, Christianity too, develops a structure reminiscent of the structures within Judaism. Jesus’ follower Matthew appears to be the only possible Levite in the group (c.f. *Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-29*), but Jesus has spoken of a general priesthood (as had God in the later Hebrew Scriptures) and so the early community develops a more synagogue like structure, where the idea of the ‘people of God’ becomes ‘the Body of Christ’.

Ekklesia: What we might think of as the word ‘Church’, also known as ‘The Body’. This is the community of believers, in relationship to Jesus, a messianic remnant if you will, bound by a single Faith and practices. *“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes.”*

Koinonia: There is an interesting word translated into the ‘community’ words in the above passage: in Greek *koinonia*. [The essential meaning of the *koinonia* speaks to the English terms *community, communion, joint participation, sharing, and even intimacy*] and is used when speaking about both

community and communion. It speaks similarly to the Roman idea of *du et des*, an interior and an exterior aspect with an [inner goodness toward virtue, and an outer goodness toward social relationships]. We get a glimpse of the continued fluid nature of the term even as late as St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century: "*the Eucharist [Communion] is the sacrament of the unity of the Church, which results from the fact that many are one in Christ.*" (*Summa Theologica*)

Apostolos: Greek for 'one who is sent', 'a messenger', from the sense where Jesus sends the disciples out to preach the message. The word has two meanings, the broader meaning of 'a messenger' and the narrow meaning of an 'apostle' linked directly to that intimate group surrounding Jesus. The former meaning of the word is translated in Latin as *missio*, the root for our word 'missionary.' So initially it is applied to the '72' missionaries in Luke, but becomes specifically applied to the Apostles, after the Resurrection, especially in the later Epistles and Book of Revelation where they are viewed as the foundation of the Faith. It implies teaching authority, the same authority Jesus claimed, derived from God and given to them, which also carried with it the power to forgive sin (also bound up in baptism). In terms of leadership, *episkopos* (bishop) is the term we hear more often and means 'overseer' or 'supervisor'. They are focused more on the spiritual needs of the community.

Diakonos: Greek for 'servant' these individuals are empowered to serve and to preach. They have limited sacramental powers and are more for the service of the physical needs of the community.

Presbyteros and hierous: the first word carries much of the same meaning of 'elder' that it had in Judaism, as does the second one, which is oriented more toward the idea of sacrifice. The late 1st century *Epistle of Clement* uses the terms *bishop* and *presbyter* interchangeably for the clergy above the rank of deacon. For Ignatius of Antioch, (late 1st to early 2nd century), bishops and presbyters were distinct offices. The use of the word 'priest' for bishops appears to have risen toward the end of the 2nd century, and speaks to the growing and developing understanding of the nature of leadership in the early community. By the time of Saint Cyprian (3rd century) it was applied to presbyters also.

More Roman Stuff or Welcome To The Circus

The Roman Law which protected the Jews initially protected the Christians. Eventually it came to be used against them. Roman law is very impressive, and in fact is the basis for English and American law (only Louisiana uses Napoleonic law). Laws were not easily overturned or forgotten and unlike many ordinances which now-a-days languish on the books, the Romans kept track of most of these laws. Christians fought hard to retain their ties to Judaism. "*In this way will the antiquity and divinity of Christianity be shown to those who suppose it of recent and foreign origin, and imagine that it appeared only yesterday.*" (Eusebius, *Church History*, 2 – 4th century) This statement goes to one of the principal objections raised against Christianity: *novelty*. As said before, antiquity was considered a prime requisite in a religion which claimed to be true, and no criticism was greater than that charge. Hence the Christian apologists laid great stress upon the antiquity of Christianity, probably one reason why they later maintained the appropriateness of the Hebrew Scriptures as part and parcel of the Christian Scriptures even against stiff internal opposition.

Welcome To The Circus: *the bad news is that you are the main attraction.*

While Jews within Israel floundered, Jews in the greater Empire flourished in a somewhat protective shell. Jewish persecution for most fell more into the realm of the destruction of the Temple and the denial of travel and access to the Temple and other sites (though Claudius does expel the Jews from Rome in 49 AD). Once the Christians had lost their coveted status as a protected religion, they fell under the full suspicion of the State. Requirements to sacrifice and to participate in the other Roman state rituals were coupled with severe penalties for not participating. Again, this is a testament to the quick

spread of Christianity within the empire, that the group could be seen as large enough to be a ‘threat’ so soon after it was established. There are 10 ‘official’ persecutions of the Christians by Rome as laid out about 500 AD:

1. **Nero** (64-68). From the burning of Rome and the traditional time for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.
2. **Domitian** (81-96).
3. **Trajan** (112-117) Christianity is outlawed but Christians are not sought out; if brought before the courts, legal proof of their guilt had to be supplied.
4. **Marcus Aurelius** (161-180) local action of the provincial governors seem to have spurred more severe punishment, rather than imperial decree.
5. **Septimius Severus** (202-210).
6. **Decius** (250-251). Christians are actively exposed by ordinances requiring public sacrifice though one could buy certificates instead of sacrificing. Martyrdoms of the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.
7. **Valerian** (257-59).
8. **Maximinus the Thracian** (235-38).
9. **Aurelian** (270–275).
10. **Diocletian/Galerius** (303-324).

Table 1: The Roman Persecutions of Christians

The first major recognized persecution was instigated by Nero and his advisers. Rome caught fire somewhere around the Circus Maximus and after valiant attempts to quell it, the fire began to grow as if re-set. It finally burned out, after about a week, but not without having consumed ten of the fourteen regions into which the city was divided. The response, which was pretty much localized to Rome, was swift and brutal. After that, the level of oppression and brutality varied. As is obvious from the time frames of this list, the persecutions, while fairly frequent were not continuous, nor were they always brutal. Several emperors and principates seemed to have been more concerned with staying alive themselves and even the bureaucracy seems to have let Christians slip through the cracks. This period of oppressive laws and/or brutal persecution saw the development of several familiar Christian practices – most notably the cult of martyrs as well as several other liturgical and ritual practices, many of which are recorded in documents and letters of that time. It also saw the expansion of Christianity, where, like Judaism, it often was in protected pockets free from the general fracas.

As a note, Christian persecution by the Romans was possibly seen as an extension of the Jewish expulsion and therefore loss of protection through the claim of ‘novelty’. Whether there is any truth to that, and certainly at an individual level there may have been, there is little evidence that ‘the Jews’ instigated or ran the subsequent Roman persecutions, even if individual Jews may have had a hand in them (there are independent reports of hostilities between Christians and Jews). Still, this bad blood probably continued until the legalization of Christianity by Constantine and likely became part and parcel of the feelings of Christians toward Jews. All early indications though, aside from any similar individual Christian sentiments, point to a tolerance of Jews within the legal system of Rome and the early Christian Emperors. Roman law was still Roman law, and statutes from the time of Julius Caesar still stood. Still, the fact that any official and active persecution of Christians by Jews as a whole was over with by sometime in the 2nd century was likely lost to time and legend.

The Christian Scriptures

This is a mention of the sacred texts, but only for context. The final nature of these scriptures is somewhat in the future and should be considered there. Suffice it to say that around the 50’s Paul begins writing and the communities are probably already circulating letters which lay out Christian beliefs and practices; by the 60’s life stories of Jesus, called ‘gospels’ (for ‘good news’) are also being circulated around the empire. Unlike Judaism and the Torah, there are no ‘foundational’ books per se,

so in a sense the gospels and letters share an almost equal footing. The production of the main Christian writings continues until the end of the 1st century and into the early 2nd century, with the final *canon* or list of books not finalized for centuries. Justifiably then, the main Scriptures for the early Church are the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially those as laid out in the *Septuagint*, though there also appear to be about 132 passages that are references to non-canonical books, both secular and sacred. As Paul says “*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*” (2 Timothy 3:16) and “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit; ...Let us then pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another.*” (Romans 14:17-19)

Putting It All Together

So how connected is Christianity to Judaism? Sectarianism had destroyed Judaism in Israel, and wiped out the Temple. It is understandable therefore that Jews and Jewish leaders everywhere might be skittish about any new sects which arise. Christianity, claiming to be a sect of Judaism, is viewed with suspicion. The Christian Scriptures speak to this later time, and the animosity which had developed between the two groups which may not have been as true in Jesus’ time and has colored many later interpretations. Suffice it to say there came a time when the Jews disavowed the sect and a separate development began. The early community was made up of Jews, converts, and Gentiles, and the Book of Acts refers to the conflicts which arose within and between these different communities, as well as problems with Jewish communities. When Saint Peter agreed to abandon the dietary laws as well as any requirement for circumcision he most probably created a crack which could not be repaired. Any disciples who were Sadducees would defiantly had problems with the latter and any Pharisees with the former.

At the same time, this unity with Hebrew history and scripture provides the early community with continuity, as well as a solid theological, liturgical, and ritualistic foundation. The Hebrew God is the one God, and His Revelation is complete in the Jewish Jesus. This also continues the nature of Revelation and informs much of the early Christian thinking about Jesus and the nature of Revelation, which is basically the relationship of humans to Creation and to God. The nature of Tradition, both oral and written is inherited from the Jews. This means that there is only one source of truth, and it is conveyed through two channels; one is physical/practical, or *natural*, and the other as metaphysical, or *supernatural*. Through personal effort one can become partially known, and the other is mystical, given as a gift. God is the giver and the human being is the receiver. Divinity and humanity are in constant interaction. God is “present in all places and filling all things;” and humanity *lives, moves, and has its being* in God, as Paul of Tarsus reemphasized (Acts 17:28). Jesus reflects these Jewish ideas.

Where do the Romans fit in? They provide a fertile ground for the quick growth of Christianity. Relative peace over a large area encourages travel, trade, and settlements. Whereas Judaism at its base is a rural religion, with urban focus and eventually transplanted to more urban areas, Christianity begins as an urban religion focused in the great cities of the Roman Empire.

“The ‘search for the historical Jesus’ came to an end when the great scholar Albert Schweitzer demonstrated that the biographers of Jesus were not really describing a first century Jew, but a nineteenth century German liberal philosopher.”

Stephen Wyles, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus: An Introduction*

“The Sadducees did not believe in the bodily resurrection; that’s why they were sad, you see...”

Anon, *Bad Pun*

My Apologies

These sections are slim at best and I give my apologies for that but that is not what we are talking about in this chapter. Apologetics is not the art of debasement but of explanation. The transition of Christianity away from Judaism into an accepted religion required a lot of fast talking and while not overly effective it is really the hallmark of the faith. The ability of the disciples to convince others through word as well as deed depended upon their ability to couch the message within understood language – mainly the language of Greek philosophy.

The Christian Scriptures

But the language they start with is also Greek, and starts with the Septuagint. What is now known as the ‘New Testament’ (to show its connection to the Covenants of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the ‘Old Testament’) like the Hebrew Scriptures before it, is comprised of several different types of writings: Gospels (~60s – 90), Epistles (~50s – 110s), and Apocalyptic Literature (~90s). Again, at this time the understanding of the canon of the Christian Scriptures is not set. Oral Tradition is combined with letters from the Apostles to give the earliest basis for Christian Faith. The earliest existent letters are those of Paul, and those are close to 20 years after the life of Jesus. Oral stories, statements, and proclamations comprise the largest foundation for about the first 50 years of Christianity; it is mainly in the 2nd century that discussions of canonicity develop which are not settled until the 4th–5th centuries (367-405). Hence statements known as ‘creeds’, from the Latin *credo*, meaning ‘I believe’, based in apostolic teachings known as *kerygma*, contain much of the core Faith from that period and were used (and are still used) with the same intention which many apply to scripture today. This Tradition is gathered into the Gospels, of which four were officially accepted as canonical. As with Judaism, the Tradition and the Scripture go hand-in-hand. It was understood that Scripture cannot stand without the Tradition beneath it nor can Tradition stand without the Scripture to back it up and both require an orthodox teaching body.

Several of the books in the Christian Scriptures are of ‘questionable’ authorship, mainly meaning that only Tradition associates them with a specific author. This in no way lessens their authority (forgive the possible pun) because they fall under the norms of authorship of that day. When Fritz Chrysler was finally exposed as the composer of several master works which were assigned to classical Masters, it in no way reduced their brilliance, and in fact illustrates the other aspect of what we are speaking about here: one writes in the ‘vein of’ another but with the same authority – sort of ‘this is what they would have said had they said it’. Faith is the Truth and only those writings which closely follow the Truth can be accepted; had his compositions had no merit they would have been dismissed outright.

Creed

Okay, so I brought it up, so I have to deal with it. We can make these claims because of the power of Tradition. The development of the final canon (Latin for *list*) of the books of the Christian Scriptures did not take place until the legitimization of Christianity by Constantine but spans the first four centuries of Christianity, and was a long continuous process. It involved the tasks of collecting, of sifting and of rejecting. That is not to say that scriptures of all sorts did not exist during that time (logically, an impossibility, as there is a canon which, as said, did not appear out of thin air in King James English) and as are so often touted today, but that they were not universal in acceptance or in its distribution. Until then, ‘songs, psalms, and inspired hymns’, homilies and oral teachings as well as any circulated writings of the Apostles and Paul and the evangelists formed the reciprocal basis for the Truths. Those Truths are

articulated in creeds. Those Creeds were as essential to the construction, articulation and spread of the Faith as scripture, and as such warranted as much attention as did the canon of Scripture. As oral statements they also held much authority in a time when written books or scrolls were scarce. And some possibly pre-date any written material.

Paul

This may seem like a strange place to put Paul but not when you think about what Paul did: he preached the message to non-Jewish cultures as well as the Jewish communities spread throughout the Roman world as well as produced the earliest accepted writings of Christianity. Paul is a Jewish Roman citizen.³ Most people might not think of him as an apologist, but his adaptation of Hellenistic thought to Judeo-Christianity and vice versa was significant. From the *Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:16-34)* we know that he engaged in philosophical debate. Spurred on by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (two major philosophies at the time), Paul mounted the Areopagus in Athens (a large flat hill above the agora and just beneath the Acropolis: the soapbox of its day) and was challenged to a discussion of ideas. The outcome was mixed, and while some derided his thought (most probably the Epicureans because he discussed the soul) some did follow his teachings which means he had some rhetorical ability and had to have some knowledge of their thought.

There is a difference between this cosmopolitan Roman and his provincial counterparts, especially Peter. We can see it in his writings; the *Pauline Epistles* (literally *letters*, and distinguished from the other Christian Scripture's letters). For example while he discounts Greek thinking in light of mystery, Paul's discussion of body and soul is a direct appeal to the Greek mind. As discussed, in Hebraic thought there was no dichotomy of body and soul, they were, as the Greeks would say, of one *substance*. If there was any division it would be between heart and mind, not between the physical and the metaphysical. There was an understanding of an afterlife, with Jesus himself speaking about preparing places in his Father's house for faithful disciples. Paul would have kept to his guns on an afterlife and probably used the Greek concept of the immortal soul to talk about it. Paul is developing the Christian theological vocabulary, using terms which have their roots in Judaism *and* Greek secular thought.

On a small note, many contend that the nature of Christianity is *Pauline*, that is, it is more about Paul's ideas than Jesus'. If we asked Paul, I think he would be appalled at that thought – it is always more about Jesus than about him; it is he who must diminish such that Christ may increase. Often the message is confused with the messenger, and Paul realizing that, fought hard against it.

Pauline Themes

Who was Jesus and what significance did that hold for humanity? For Paul the first question is only important in light of the second. While the Gospels seek to make the message of Jesus available using his own words and actions, Paul is seeking to use them to define 'Church' and put those words into practical application within the Church. He wants to emphasize the urgent nature of returning fully to God using the grace of Jesus' death and resurrection. In a way, though deep and complex, Paul's teaching is fairly simple in its themes and really could be reduced to three main themes: the Cross, the Resurrection and the Return (*Parousia*) and often the three are intermixed (c.f. *1 Thessalonians 4:14-15; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Romans 8:34; 14:9*). But let us break them down just a bit.

Christology: Jesus is of God – he is legitimately *the* Christ; in Jesus, God has fully entered into human history, even more so than the Sinai Covenant, thereby perfecting and in a sense superseding it. His

³ Examples of Paul as a Pharisee: *Acts 23:6-9, 26:5-9; Philippians 3:5-9* and Paul as Roman: *Acts 22:22-29; Acts 23:23-30*

nature is human and divine; he is the conduit of God's grace and only by knowing Jesus can you know the Father. Paul quotes two obviously existent songs to reinforce his teachings (*Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:15-20*).

The Cross: Jesus died, because he lived. His death was sacrifice for our sins – the normal ritual sacrifice for the expiation of sin: an unblemished lamb. That death was necessary and efficacious; our own deaths are joined to Jesus' as is our suffering. The suffering of the world is made perfect within the suffering of Jesus (*1 Cor 1:17-18; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Gal 6:14; Phil 2:8; Rom 5:6-11; 6:1-14*).

Salvation in Jesus: through that death and that death alone do we receive our salvation. The Law no longer suffices or is necessary for the removal of sin – Jesus died *once and for all*; Gentiles as well as Jews now have access to the Covenant and salvation. The Law, by itself is not sufficient to the task; only Christ's life and death bring it to fruition. Our whole purpose in life is to get to heaven. (*2 Cor 5:1-10*).

Forgiveness: the glue which holds us together and is the whole purpose of Jesus' death. Without the



death of the living Jesus, there is only death. The community must live that death, that is be bonded to the forgiving nature of Jesus and forgive one another.

Unity: we are all one Body because we now belong to Jesus; this oneness gives us all a share in the divinity of Jesus. We are bound by his sacrifice both of the Cross and of the Eucharist (*1*

Cor 11:23-25).

Resurrection: just as the death of Jesus was real, so was his resurrection. This reality means that we who share in the unity of the Body, i.e. are within Christ will also enjoy that same new life (*1 Cor 15:1-58*).

Orthodoxy: keep in line with leaders and hold to the one Faith. Our unity with and within Christ compels us to keep to that unity and to avoid and deny any contrary teachers or teachings; to do otherwise is to be outside of the community (*Rom 1:1-6;*).

Eschatology: early: Christ is coming soon; later: I may not make it with you. In reflection of some of Jesus' eschatological teachings, it is going to get worse before it gets better. We should live our lives by the teachings (*1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 1 Thess 4:13--5:11; 2 Thess 2:1-15; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Cor 16:22*).

As a note about the Epistles in the Christian Scriptures, their arrangement in the canon is by size not by date, largest to smallest.

Peter, Paul, And Roma

The community in Rome predates the arrival of both Peter and Paul. Paul's letter to the Romans, easily one of the most important in early Christianity, is in fact a letter of introduction to an existing community. That Rome is important is spoken to by the fact that both Peter and Paul are there at the same time. The only other references to them together in the same place at the same time are once in Antioch and once in Jerusalem, during the ecumenical council to decide the requirements of entry into the Church.

Figure 2: The Spread of Christianity pre-325

It is the death of Peter and Paul in Rome and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem three or four years later which draws the focus of Christianity to Rome. Rome, Antioch (in Turkey), and Alexandria (in Egypt) are the intellectual centers of the Empire and therefore of Christianity. The Empire is beginning to fragment, with leader after leader taking charge, with little or no continuity, save that wonderful bureaucracy which survives through it all. Rome, then, as the singular city of the Empire, becomes an anchor point for the young Church. This is not to say that it is the only point. Eventually five cities will be established as centers, known as *Patriarchies*, Rome,

Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and finally after the split of Constantine's empire, Constantinople. Suffice it to say that for some reasons we will hopefully discuss, Rome, as the 'death/birth' place of Peter and Paul holds a special place within these administrative zones.

Trinity

One of the reasons they died was the distinction of Jesus as the Christ. It is the very nature of Jesus which calls for the contemplation of another central tenet of Christianity: the Trinity. The Christian God is one as is the Jewish God, though one develops three 'understandings' if you will, within what is best called 'the Godhead'. For the Church, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of the one God. That God is one is attested to by the Jews and spoken of throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and confirmed by Jesus. That there is a 'Father' is attested by Jesus. That there is the Son follows from that, in Jesus. That there is a Spirit, an active force which, like the Son, flows from the Father is also attested to by Jesus, and also by Jesus within his Body, the Church.

Since Jesus reveals the three persons, the Church begins to see the three natures within the one God throughout Scripture (remember this is Hebrew Scripture). They confess it as they come to understand the nature of Jesus the Son. Still the term the 'Trinity' was first used by the Tertullian in the late 2nd century, to provide a succinct term for the tri-unity of the persons that existed in the Godhead. The singular nature of the plural term articulates there is one God, who exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each is fully God and each is equally God. There is no room here to expound upon the mystery of the Trinity; suffice it to say that it is *the central mystery* of Christianity.⁴

Martyrs

Peter and Paul are not the first to die in Nero's persecution, nor were they the last. With the persecutions come many deaths. To modern sensibilities many of these deaths (if we are to believe the legends) seem senseless at best and suicides at worst. Even Paul preaches moderation on beliefs – if they do not cause 'scandal', that is something which might cause another to lose their faith (*1 Corinthians 8*). But martyrdom was not seen as extreme. These inauspicious deaths fitted in nicely with the death of Jesus and the understanding of martyrdom fitted in nicely with the understanding of life and death which the Church professed. To die for the faith was to die to self and to die for others. As with Jesus, it was a free choice because certainly one could easily denounce one's beliefs and be spared, and certainly there were those who did, but history does not record them, only the ones who freely choose to die rather than give up on the Kingdom.

The 'cult of martyrs' as it is known is not a zombie-like state but is the honoring of those who made the ultimate sacrifice – often to protect others – for which they have been 'washed in blood'. If we think back to the Sinai Covenant and the sprinkling of blood to seal the Covenant we can begin to understand the belief. This tradition involves the veneration of not just the action but of the person, where others gather about the body and seek to receive from its glow of holiness some inspiration and courage. It is tied into what is known as the 'Communion of Saints'. Paul calls the Body 'the Saints in light'. Those of the Body are saints. This means that living or dead, as Christ who died and was raised is tied to the Body, we are tied together. This also speaks back the Maccabean tradition where the dead and the living are connected. So to celebrate liturgy over the body of the martyr or holy one is to celebrate *with them*. Again, remember that this is not an intellectual exercise. God is present, Jesus is real and really present; the sacred is here and now, and not just for us but outside of time. It is mystery, revealed but beyond comprehension. People are willing to die for something which they feel is *here and now*; the Kingdom of

⁴ "If you deny the trinity you lose your soul, if you try to explain the trinity you may lose your mind" - an old adage attributed to St. Augustine

God is at hand, and through Jesus' death and Resurrection, we the living and the dead participate in that Kingdom (albeit imperfectly), as the Body of Jesus, seated at the right had of the Father and alive here on earth.

Those who die therefore are actually 'born' – to new life. They transcend space and time and belong to all places and all times. The activities of prayer, teaching, and service they performed on earth continue in their new life.⁵ Therefore they are never far from us nor we from them. Similar to their baptism, where they move from death (in sin) to life (in Jesus the raised), in martyrdom, they move from life to 'fullness of life'. When Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome they are born to new life in the Kingdom. The performance of rituals over the bodies of the martyrs is a statement of the connection between the living and the dead, as is the agape meal ritual celebrated. This practice spoke directly to the Roman sense of *do ut des* and patronage.

Justin Martyr

Of specific note along the lines of that (this chapter that is⁶) and as an example of the Church at the time was Justin Martyr who lived in the second century. He converted to Christianity in Ephesus after flirtations with several philosophical schools, and died about 100 years after the events he is defending, during the reign (and therefore subsequent persecution) of the philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius. Justin had opened a Christian school in Rome, training many students in apologetics and theology as well as philosophy. His main works are apologetic aimed not at students but at leaders, a wide audience from the Emperor and the Senate, to Greeks, Roman officials, or to whoever he thought might have influence and might be influenced by his arguments in hopes of keeping Christianity and his fellow Christians safe.

Justin was intent on showing how Christianity brought 'completeness' to the pagan philosophies. One of the ways he does this is to use of the idea of the *Logos*, a Greek word meaning *word*, but meaning much more, basically the rational force and design at work in the universe. By now the idea of the *Logos* was widely familiar to most, and the designation of the Son of God as the *Logos* was not new to Christian theology by the end of the 1st century, as we see from the prologue to the Gospel of John. The manner in which Justin identifies the historical Christ with the rational force operative in the universe leads up to a claim of all truth and virtue being contained within Christianity and that the adoration of Christ alone (which aroused so much opposition) is the only reasonable attitude, that is, it is the only *reasonable* way to think.

It is not so much that Justin depends upon understood philosophical concepts to explain Christology or Trinitarian doctrine or other Christian beliefs but that he wants his audience to see that what they already believe is *contained within* and perfected by belief in Christ. This Christianity is not a mumbo-jumbo, non-intelligent superstition of peasants but is from the very fabric of the universe. According to his writings, after disputing with a friend who was a Cynic (not a naysayer but a philosophy which is something of a basis for Stoicism where one lived in harmony with Nature and eschewed vain pursuits like fame and fortune) he was turned in to the authorities. Justin was tried together with six companions and was, like Paul, beheaded. Perhaps one of the most fascinating things about the whole affair is the contemporary writings of a student that preserve some of the court record from the trial which gives us great insight into both the demands and arguments surrounding Christianity at the time (about 165).

Justin also fits into another niche. As a prolific writer, he defines or tells us of many of the ideas and understandings of his time, on a whole range of theological subjects. While many of these have had foundational effect of the language and understanding of the subject, some have been open to broader interpretation over time. Some time after his death he was denounced for what may be considered

⁵ c.f. *Wisdom 3:1-11, Hebrews 12:1-2, Romans 8:35-39.*

⁶ "My point is...and I do have one..." *Ellen DeGeneres*

incorrect teachings. Not so much for his discussion of them but how they were used centuries later. His use of philosophical words and themes caused some to question his conclusions. Many thinkers share a similar fate of back and forth acceptance and denouncement. Some, like Justin remain saints...others like Origen, while no longer denounced, are not considered saints or Fathers.

Stay Close To The Candles...

Many want to mark the transition from 'Early Christianity' to be 325 AD, the point when Constantine legalized Christianity⁷. But if we look, the first major transition takes place with the death of the Apostles and any early witnesses, about the end of the 1st century. Most of the major writings have been made during this period. We probably can make another in about the mid 2nd century, with the 'Apostolic Fathers' or second generation witnesses (those who knew some the earliest witnesses). Yet another comes with the Patristic era at which point anyone who know anyone directly is gone. However we choose to mark it, there is not a sudden pre-Constantine/post-Constantine split. The Church spread and grew, regardless of the persecutions, and probably in spite of them. All the time it gets farther and farther away in time from its origins.

When we spoke earlier of the progression of religions in the area, it may have seemed as if some of them faded away. But the entire world is not Jewish or Christian. On a personal observation (***warning: personal observations ahead***), in a world struggling with the decline of belief in the sacred, people develop systems which fill in the voids. Many are bastardizations or hodge-podges of beliefs systems cobbled together to make something 'new' as all earlier systems must be failures, having not already saved the world. Often there is an element of control, personal decisions made which wrest the sacred from God and place it in the hands of believers. So it is also with Judaism and Christianity as well. For example, one early (and persistent) group was the Gnostics, from the Greek 'to know'. They were secret groups with 'secret knowledge', available only to the select few, something which flies in the face of Christianity. For example the followers of Valentinus believed in reincarnation. Other followers, in the 2nd century drew upon Chaldean astrology, to which was later added Greek ideas including a variation of Plato's transmigration of the soul. Tenants like the Cross became less of signs and more of symbols, with hidden meanings and 'power'. Manichaeism spread both east and west from Babylonia, where its founder Mani had lived in the early to mid 3rd century such that Manichaean monasteries existed in Rome in 312 AD. Manichaeism's form of Christianity shows a real Buddhist influence, including that of reincarnation. In yet another circular revelation, the great Saint Augustine was initially influenced by Manichaeism.

The farther the Church gets away from Jesus the harder it is to maintain the message in its pure form. In order to grow, many routes were explored to spread the message. Some of these routes led to places which misshaped the message. From the beginning, even Jesus warned against being led astray from the Faith and his true message. Paul, Peter, John, among others all wrote extensively about avoiding error, following good leaders and testing the message of any who claimed to know the Truth. The adherence to orthodoxy was a reoccurring undercurrent to any foundation to the Church. Yet at the same time the struggle to be relevant and dynamic in order to spread the message led to sincere struggles, some of which still continue today.

There is a thin line here. Take, for example this short exchange I lifted from <http://aggreen.net/heterodox/heterodx.html> (do not worry about the concepts here, more about the timbre of the arguments):

Scott Hahn, a vocal Presbyterian minister who with his wife Kimberley converted to Roman Catholicism, said in his book Rome Sweet Rome: Our Journey to Catholicism:

⁷ And for a variety of reasons which will not be discussed at this time.

"Further study led me to conclude that Orthodoxy was wonderful for its liturgy and tradition but stagnant in theology." Clark Carlton, a well-known Baptist who converted to Orthodoxy, counters in his book *The Truth: What Every Roman Catholic Should Know About the Orthodox Church*: "If the alternative to being 'stagnant' means changing the Creed (the Filioque), worrying about going to a non-existent place (purgatory), paying money to stay out of said non-existent place (indulgences), turning the Virgin Mary into some sort of super-human (an immaculately conceived co-redemptrix) and making the bishop of one city into an infallible, universal potentate with both spiritual and political sovereignty, then the Orthodox will gladly stay stagnant."

While both of these statements contain a level of truth they also show (in my opinion) an appalling lack of understanding of either side, as well as illustrate the struggle which brings us to the discussion of two terms: *Orthodoxy* and *Heterodoxy*.

Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy

The word *Orthodoxy* (Greek meaning *right-teaching*) conjures up a sense of the straight and narrow. It speaks to holding on to Tradition and Scripture with a tight rein and within a set of boundaries and having a traceable authentic tradition. Another term we might use is *accepted belief*.

Heterodoxy (Greek meaning *other-teaching*) is a tougher term. For some it strictly means 'unorthodox' as in *anti-orthodox* or *heresy*; for most others it falls more into the realm of 'disagreement' or more of a lower level difference of opinion, but not outside of the accepted norms of orthodoxy. Another word we might use is *diversity*.

The strength of orthodoxy is stability and stability counts for a lot. It has helped the Jews hold their message together for thousands of years and through hundreds of cleansings and hard times. It speaks to the fidelity of God who does not change and to the message which remains unchanged. Heterodoxy speaks to the human condition, one of mysteries which are not fully penetrated. Orthodoxy would say that the mystery is the mystery – let it go. Heterodoxy says that there may be something more we can understand of/from that mystery. So what is the balance? For its first thousand years the Church tolerated much diversity as long as it remained within the boundaries. Heterodox beliefs are usually beliefs on subjects which are not fully defined, or are possible understandings of existing loosely defined teachings. Ultimately heterodoxy describes beliefs that differ from strictly orthodox views but that fall short of our next topic: heresy.

Heresy

So, while the thinkers and writers of this period were mainly focused on secular powers and thinkers, there was also developing an internal strife between thinkers within Christianity. The early attempts at apologetics also produced lines of thinking based within the Greco-Roman mindset which fell into direct conflict with *orthodox* teachings. As time goes by and less and less effort was needed to convince the populous, the writings and argumentation turned more toward Christian ideas and the discussion of whether or not the ideas had merit within the Christian ethos. Both of these situations produced what has become known as *heresy*. Heresy comes from the Greek for *to choose*, as in choosing what you want to believe, and in a no-brainer, the conflict of that belief with orthodoxy. Some disputes were in terms of orthodoxy to lunatic fringe kind of issues, like the *Gnostics* and other mystery cults but others were the product of sincere and intellectually honest efforts to reach understanding using the philosophical concepts of the day.

Most of the earliest heresies deal with the nature of Christ as both human and divine, or what is called the *hypostatic union*. This idea is central to the Christo-centric Christians, and informs not only many doctrines but many future theologians and philosophers. Because of this, the ideas of nature, substance, accidents, the soul, the divine and many other Greek philosophical subjects all come into

play. At the same time the meaning of a term, the way in which it is used and its use to describe a single aspect of Christology could often be misconstrued and/or over-developed, resulting in conflict. Heresy, different than heterodoxy, is in complete opposition to the Faith and is officially condemned. The concept of Body, of unity, of oneness is called into question when the tenets of the Faith are in question. To interpret a tenet in a new way is very different from denying it, as Arius did when he denied the divinity of Jesus.

Ecumenical Councils

In line with this and especially with the legitimization of Christianity, the cosmopolitan nature of the believers lent itself to the solving of global problems and standardization of doctrinal issues. The means of accomplishing this was the *council*, specifically an *ecumenical* (meaning non-regional, or including everybody) *council* and the theological discussions were informed by philosophical and scriptural language. The conflict over the nature of Christ took many forms and the arguments from both philosophical and scriptural sources raged over centuries.

The idea of an ecumenical council was not new to 4th century Christianity with the first actually recorded in Scripture in Acts, called the Council of Jerusalem which helped to settle the question of who could be Christian and what the requirements for entry would be. So in fact it has a long history within Christianity and Judaism (the Jews used a council in the 2nd century to determine their final canon for the Hebrew Scriptures). The development of the council allowed Judaism and Christianity after it, to finalize the means of establishing authority and uniformity (orthodoxy). The norms fall under three titles: Scripture (both Hebrew and Christian), Tradition (both Jewish and Apostolic) and Magisterium (which is just a big Latin word for teachers – Rabbis and Bishops respectfully); Scripture as the written word, Tradition is the spoken words and sanctioned actions practiced but not ‘written down’ and Magisterium is the teaching/conserving body. Appeals to reason will often refer to one of these bodies.

Theology is not necessarily limited to these authorities, because it is the exploration of God using human intellect (both *a priori* reason and *a posteriori* experience), and as such is often brought into conflict with the established authority. In the end, any appeal, either theological or doctrinal must be made to these authorities.

Putting It All Together

Okay another huge one which really does not seem to cover the topic it professed to start with. Well, I can only say, get used to it. The concern here is that the Early Christian community sought to integrate and protect itself within the larger Roman culture. It also sought to stabilize itself internally, creating a structure of leaders, based in the Faith, who were capable of and charged with determining the Faith *and* protecting that Faith.

So really this chapter is more about the settling of the Faith than it is about the Faith itself. The theological Truths about Christ, God and the sacred nature of the universe are being explored and shared, but while that sharing is leading to good things, more Christians, deeper understanding and development of the mysteries among others, it is also leading to bad things, schisms and strife within the faithful. Paul and the Apostles seek to herd and spread, calling the faithful to courage and steadfastness, cajoling them to right behavior and warning them of wrong thinking. But even after they have died, they live on. They continue to guide the Church with prayers and actions because they continue to have Jesus’ ear and to hear direction from Jesus.

"It is my purpose also to give the names and number and times of those who through love of innovation have run into the greatest errors, and, proclaiming themselves discoverers of knowledge falsely so-called have like fierce wolves unmercifully devastated the flock of Christ."

Eusebius (~260-341), *Church History*

"The world was very old indeed when you and I were young."

G. K. Chesterton, *To Edmund Clerihew Bentley*

A Sampler of Heresies

| Time | Name | Really Rough Soundbyte | Type | Proponents | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Late 1 st century | Docetists | Denied Humanity of Jesus | Christological | Basilides Valentinus Patripassians Sabellians | | | |
| | Gnostics | Diverse grouping of a movement which combined various ideas; Rejection of material world, among other things | Central Core Beliefs | | | | |
| 2 nd century | Ebionites | Denied Divinity of Jesus | | | | | |
| 4 th century | Arians | Jesus was Created | | Arius, Origen | | | |
| | Appollinarians | Divine Controlled the Human | | Apollinarius | | | |
| | Monarchists | Jesus was Adopted | | | | | |
| | Modalism | No Trinity, 3 'modes' of God | | | | | |
| 5 th century | Nestorians | Human Controlled the Divine | | Nestorius | | | |
| | Eutychians | Both Natures Combined into a New Third | | | | | |
| | Monophysits | Only One Nature not two | | | | | |
| | Monothelitism | Compromise: Only one Will | | | | | |
| | Pelagianism | No Original Sin | | | | | |

Table 2

The Early Middle

With the legitimizing of Christianity within the Empire, a shift begins to take place in the nature of the theological exploration. And, in the vein of all good things must come to an end, so it is with the purely Roman Empire.

Church Economy

The word ‘economy’ does not sound like one you would use in reference to religious belief but at its root, it merely means ‘the orderly interplay between the parts of a system or structure’⁸ (*Collins English Dictionary*), meaning how a system fits together and works or in our case, what we might also refer to as ‘Salvation History’. This is a history which speaks not to the modern understanding of history but back to our earlier understanding and what is most commonly referred to as “God’s Plan”. As Christianity becomes the ‘world’⁹, understanding this becomes a paramount concern for all involved.

Church History

The history of the Church at this time is probably over-simply reduced to *Christology*. And the name is significant. We do not have ‘*Jesusology*’, but instead have a focus on the messianic (Greek: *christos*) or salvific aspects of Jesus, which asks the questions about the nature of Jesus’ messiahship, and therefore about his very nature, and by final extrapolation, our own. Many of the Church’s major problems and triumphs center about this issue. The Trinity, the Marian doctrines, the nature of the Church, salvation, Scripture, sacraments – everything orbits about Christ’s nature. The earlier Apologists were brilliant thinkers and they laid a solid, philosophical groundwork for the theology to come. But this also brings us to the two camps on that subject: philosophy good for helping us to explain and expound – the ‘handmaiden’ of theology camp and philosophy bad – the all errors introduced through philosophical language camp.

In 313, after seizing control of Rome, Constantine and Licinius (in the East – who married Constantine’s sister) sign the *Edict of Milan*, granting religious freedom *throughout* the empire. Most likely for the reason that by this time a large portion of the bureaucracy was Christian, and it is easier to run a government if you do not kill everyone running it. It also gave Christians legal rights and protections under Roman law. All this meant that Christians were not to be persecuted and that they had recourse under the law if they were. It also gave them the right of assembly, which brought the Church out of the underground (literally in some cases) into the assembly houses or *basilicas*.

In 323 Constantine defeated Licinius for control of the whole empire. At this same time the Church, now ‘free’ for 10 years, is being torn asunder internally by the Arian controversy (a denial of Christ’s divinity), which in turn could sever the tenuous unity of the empire. In 325 Constantine calls the Ecumenical Council of Nicea (in the north of present day Turkey close to the site of Constantinople) to finally settle the matter and bring full peace to the empire. From it arises (but not in finalized form) a creedal statement, known as the *Nicaean Creed*, which once again reminds us of the importance of Tradition, even at this late date.

The death of Constantine in 337 once again signals the beginning of the end for a singular, cohesive empire. If its strength as an empire was because of the single focus point of Rome, then its final split and

⁸ via Latin *nemein* to manage, from Greek *oikonomia* ‘domestic management’, from *oikos* house + *-nomia*.

⁹ i.e. the Roman world.

division between Rome and Constantinople evokes the situation which Alexander's empire ended up – scattered and at odds with itself.

Church Fathers

As said, to retain that initial tenuous unity, Constantine called the Nicaean council to rely upon the many great theological minds at that period of time to solve the problem once and for all. This is certainly a political move, as much as the Edict of Milan was, but it is also more. If we can see Christology is the pivot of theology, then we might also see historical events as the pivots of Christianity. The world is still surrounded by the sacred; many people still rely upon the gods. At this point these issues are not intellectual issues (though they may be to some); they are becoming the fabric of ritual and Faith and therefore life. Normal people fight in the street over this; that is how important it is to everyday life.

These thinkers are called the *Church Fathers*. In this situation the word *Father* is used to mean a teacher of spiritual things. Patrology, from the Latin for *father* also known as *patristics*, is the study of these men. The tradition of the Fathers goes back to the 2nd century, and early on, bishops were considered 'Fathers in Christ'. In our case this term specifically applies those 'fathers' whose teachings (by now usually preserved in their own writings) were of particular import for determining doctrine. They follow on the heels of the Apostolic Fathers of the 1st and early 2nd centuries and their dogma. So technically, appeals to the Fathers are an appeal to Tradition; they are appeals stepping back through earlier Magisterium to Apostolic Teachings, which are held on to and passed on through the 'Fathers' to the 'present' time, whenever that might be.

As an example of the importance and impact of these thinkers, let us consider one such bishop, Irenaeus (130-202). Whenever we take up a Bible we touch his work. He wrote extensively on the subject and so played a decisive role in helping to fix the idea of a canon for the Christian Scriptures early on. It is easy for us, now, to think of Scripture – and the New Testament in particular – not only as the basis of the Church, but as something that fell from the sky in its present form – in English no less – and harder to remember that it was the Church that had to decide, early on, using Tradition, especially in the form of creeds, and its authority as passed on to the Magisterium, on what was scriptural and what was not.

Until Irenaeus, there was a vaguely discussed but unwritten, general agreement on which books were 'scriptural'. This operating mode based in common consent, was as you might imagine extremely weak. As noted, when philosophical thought began to be used for doctrinal purposes, dissensions and heresies inevitably arose. Making reference to a fixed and understood canon of Scripture was the only way of trying to settle what the actual Truth. But in the absence of a strong, agreed upon fixed canon it was all too easy to attack one's opponent by saying that his texts were 'corrupt' or 'unscriptural' (meaning non-canonical); and easy, without fixed *versions* of the Scriptures as well, to do a little fine-tuning of texts to bolster one's own arguments. So Irenaeus, in the face of much opposition and some heresy, took it upon himself and went through all the available books that were generally considered 'scriptural', and all the possible candidates (such as the Gnostic, magical pseudo-Gospels, and the novel *Shepherd of Hermas*). His aim was not to simply declare each book as accepted or rejected under his own authority, because then his opponents could say that he merely trying to justify his own theology. Instead he started the tradition of biblical scholarship, giving reasons based on much research, for and against the canonicity of each book. Except for three of the short universal epistles, Irenaeus' canon is very nearly the final canon as accepted by the Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419 (under Augustine) and recertified at the Council of Trent in the 1500's.

As has been true since the beginning of time, it is this balance of Scripture and Creed (Tradition) under the understood authority granted by Christ which these 'Fathers' worked within and produced

many of the basic understandings and proofs, as well as the very Scriptures upon which the Faith relies. This SOP reflects Paul's ideas of unity, dependence upon the teachings of the Apostles, as well as the adherence to the leaders appointed by those apostles to keep the Faith alive as well as pure.

The Man In The Middle

Speaking of Augustine (354-430), when we think of Fathers of this time, great minds like Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Athanasius or Jerome come to the forefront. But in the interest of time, we will concentrate the great theological mind of Augustine.

Augustine was the child of a mixed marriage – his mother, Monica, was Christian and his father was not – something still quite common even as late as the 5th century. Consequentially, while his mother prayed fervently for his conversion, he wandered through dissolute living, philosophies and belief systems. He settled, in his thirties, on the Greek philosopher Plato, especially as envisioned in what was known as Neo-Platonism and then finally Christianity, especially as proposed by St. Paul. He was eventually forced into becoming a priest and then the bishop of Hippo (in North Africa). Even in that path he wandered through at least one heresy (recall that doctrine is still somewhat unsettled at this time and many 'accepted' ideas are still floating about, only to later be considered incorrect) in spite of which he is considered one of the major Fathers of the Church. His genius comes through in his refiguring the thoughts of many earlier and contemporary theologians and in his adaptation of Plato's ideas and thinking to develop profound explanations for Christian beliefs and the development of several major Christian doctrines.

While the earlier apologists utilized philosophical thought to explain Christianity, Augustine as they say 'baptized' it, transforming it from secular, 'pagan' thought into 'Christian' thought. His musings moved reason and wisdom away from the indifferent fatalism they embodied at the time to be aspects of God, as Scripture indicates. He found within the Faith, congruent ideas, ones which gave deeper meaning and direction to Plato's more vague religious thinking. This is not a mere adaptation of Christianity to Platonism but a completion of Platonic thought within Christianity. Due to our creation in the image of God and sharing in the Body per the Incarnation of Jesus, the gifts of reason and God's wisdom have been given to humans in order to understand how to live correctly and make sense of the rational and emotional conflicts within the world. Augustine wants to understand how God (and especially as revealed in Jesus) put things together, in other words, how to make sense of them in terms of God's gift of reason (of which Jesus is the archetype – the *Logos*). He wants to put the God given tools of the intellect to use. Like Jewish thinkers before him, Augustine is *practical*, more concerned with the solution of religious, ethical and moral problems than with those of pure speculation.

So what are 'practical' things to think about? Before his conversion Augustine started a club, if you will, for discussing ideas. The favorite topics at their gatherings were *truth*, *certainty*, what was *true happiness in philosophy*, *the problem of evil in a rational world* and finally *God and the soul*. From this we can see his attraction of Christianity with its dogmatic truths and fairly well understood Faith, its specific understanding of God and the relationship of human freedom and happiness (as well as suffering) tied directly into this specific Faith. So things like what is evil (sin), how are we spared evil (grace), and our own participation in them (human will) become the focus of many of his writings.

Augustine personifies the changing of the playing field from earlier apologists (realizing that he is a transitional figure between the apologists – he is still explaining Christianity to a world which is not Christian – and theologians – those explaining Christianity to a world which is mainly Christian). Whereas apologists strictly used Greek philosophy to help their pagan hearers understand Christian concepts and dogmas within concepts they knew, Augustine is using it to *produce* and refine Christian doctrine. He also stands as another one of those thresholds in religious thought. He dwells in that hinterland between the late Roman World (and all that implies) and the early Medieval World (and all that implies).

He pulls the wisdom of the past forward into the time to come. In a way then, we can consider him as the last 'Roman', yet setting the ground work for Christendom to come.

Without Augustine, much of classical philosophy might have been lost. At the same time, Augustine rejects Aristotle in favor of Plato leading to a decline of non-Platonic thought – slowing its transition into Medieval times. Many see this period as the beginning of a decline in intellectual progress but they fail to see the thinking of the time, injecting modern bias into the rational and motives of these thinkers. Face it; Plato was just not as important as God. As Christianity rises to become the dominant religion, there is no need to focus on secular thinking – theology becomes the language of the time. As Metaphysics was the first science for Aristotle so it is for these thinkers. All science, all knowledge, all human energy is focused on the sacred, and as we have discussed again and again, and any knowledge or meaning only has merit in light of the sacred. As it is, more energy is directed at understanding God as revealed in Jesus than in the circulatory system. The limits and boundaries of a thought are placed within the sacred and Augustine reflects this thinking. To understand God is to understand the Universe.

The Middle In Man

Just as for Judaism, God is the center of all things; the one in whom “*we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28).¹⁰ Humanity is God’s greatest creation. Without humans, and more specifically without human will, the purpose of creation as well as the nature of evil in creation would be a moot point. Augustine takes on the questions about these things specifically because he is seeking to understand God and God’s plan especially the ‘why are we here’ and ‘why would Jesus need to come and die’ ones. He is not seeking human answers to life’s persistent questions, but to understand the answers which God has already revealed to us, and only as they reside with the Faith. He was the first to synthesize the doctrines of the Fall, grace, and free will.

So we start with the nature of Jesus. Jesus is the *Logos*, according to Paul and especially the evangelist John. This means that the divine, rational design of the universe has a face, and not just a face but a *human* face, and that face *represents* The Will (*John 10*) on earth. For the Greeks, the nature of the universe was that it *was*, that is, everything *already* existed even before creation (think back to the discussion of the creation myths in earlier chapters). So bring it forward. For Augustine, God is all there is and the only thing that always was. At the risk of over-simplifying this whole argument¹¹, according to Genesis, God creates everything out of nothing (in Latin *ex nihilo*) and that argument is good enough for Augustine because God is more than just *The Will*. God is Trinity. God is not only the potter but the creator of the clay. He accomplishes this through his very nature, which is *triune* (divided into thirds). The Father is Creator, the Son/*Logos*/Will is the vehicle of that creation and the Spirit is action of creation. So the Son (the *Logos*) is the means, as for the Platonists, for the *structure* of the universe. But, as the person of the Father is not limited to just being the Son, He can be responsible for all substance (the thing which makes something what it is). What this means is that God, or the Godhead if you will, does not shift from one form to another. God does not start out as Father and then stop being the Father to be the Son, and then become the Spirit after the Son dies. He is all three, always. As said, for Augustine the triune God means that there is no necessary explanation needed beyond them to understand the nature of the universe, even of all substance – God is and always was so it is perfectly within reason that He, as Father, Son, and Spirit, created all things from nothing.

But there is a struggle. Does that mean he also ‘created’ Jesus the God/man? The Trinity proves that Jesus was always *one with the father* (*John 10:30*) and the nature of creation requires the three persons in that one God. Okay but why would Jesus need to become human then, could he not have remained

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, this passage is a reference to a Greek thinker, Epimenides of Knossos (6th century BC).

¹¹ A risk I am apparently often willing to take.

divine and just 'looked' human? The answer to this, simply put, is once again in the Trinity, in relationship. The Law puts humanity in intimate relationship with God. The Incarnation (Latin for 'in-fleshing') of the person of Jesus falls right into line with the nature of both God and of humanity, creating the most intimate relationship possible.

So, our relationship with God is central to the sacred nature of life and is the key to understanding Christ's nature. To avoid or turn away from that relationship, its covenants and responsibilities, is called *sin*. God makes it clear that the first choice in the Garden of Eden against the relationship leads one to less and less freedom and therefore into more sin – that is a cyclic deeper severing of the relationship. Based on *Romans 5:12* Augustine states "*the deliberate sin of the first man is the cause of original sin*"¹² (*De Nuptiis Et Concupiscentia*); it is a hereditary stain.¹³ For Augustine, that 'first sin' of Adam and Eve is the first journey of humanity into sin and the basis for continued sin. Its result seals it as part of our nature – death. Before we did not die, now we do. What does that tell us about our nature and God's? It is clear that the eternal problem of evil is our fault because, like the Platonist's understanding, all of God's work is good (*Genesis 1*) making the only source of moral evil the poor exercise of our freewill (*City of God*).

Human freewill is not so much the choice for good or evil but the limitless capacity for good or for evil. It is a capacity which was held in balance; this absolute equilibrium existed in Adam but was destroyed after original sin. After the fall "*the will has to struggle and react against an inclination to evil, but it remains mistress of its choice*" (*Opus Imperfectum Contra Julianum*). In other words, in God's perfect creation, freewill was truly free, because it stayed in balance through the internal steadfastness built into us, our God-given desire to please God, and not through any work on our part. Again, this perfect freedom lost is *not the liberty of choosing between good and evil* (because with it we would always choose good and without it we could not help but sin) but the true freedom of doing God's will which *was calm and without struggle*. We can see this reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures: "*Listen, my people, I give you warning! If only you will obey me, Israel! There must be no foreign god among you; you must not worship an alien god. I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth that I may fill it.' But my people did not listen to my words; Israel did not obey me. So I gave them over to hardness of heart; they followed their own designs. But even now if my people would listen, if Israel would walk in my paths, in a moment I would subdue their foes, against their enemies unleash my hand.*" (*Psalms 81*)

It is this combining of natures in Jesus which makes the difference. Jesus has that perfect balance of freewill – he is the new Adam (*Romans 5:14*) – and we are part of him and of the new creation also rebalanced by Jesus. But while restored by Jesus' death, we are still humans, and our nature still leans to sin. It is not Jesus' life which saves us but his death. Paul says that "*God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*" (*Romans 5:8*). The difference is that while we have not changed, that balance nature has been restored to us. We are free.

Grace Period

Our undoing of freewill brought Jesus into the world. If sin is the perversion of the Will and evil is its result, what makes it all better? Non Christians blamed the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 on Christians because they had caused so many to turn away from the old gods who, apparently due to some form of nostalgia or rose colored glasses on the part of their adherents, had kept Rome safe until then. Augustine saw it differently; the old Rome was being swept away in favor of the New Jerusalem. Like Plato's Republic based in laws and run with Wisdom by philosopher kings, Augustine saw the

¹² We can also see this is Psalm 51 "*Behold, I was born in guilt, in sin my mother conceived me.*"

¹³ Recall also the Jewish idea of 'the sins of the father are visited upon the heads of the sons'.

perfect city (*City of God*) based in love and run by Christ the King, who was the *Logos*, Wisdom personified.

Humans are unable by themselves to keep the balance. Grace is the gift of God to help us on our way. We are able to take it or leave it. But only by humble submission of the human will to the divine will do peace and happiness come. Augustine does not see this as weakness, as might Epicurus, but like the Stoics or Plato, as an adjustment of our thinking to the natural flow of the universe. But he takes it further than the Stoics or Plato, everything depends upon Grace. In *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* he says that even our first desires for salvation are due to the grace of God, which therefore absolutely controls our 'predestination'. This is not predestination without freedom, but more of the predetermined outcome that Paul speaks of. If we live wisely and with love then we will go to heaven. God's grace is sufficient to that task. We live truly free, beyond the Law and within Jesus, where the balance of freewill is re-established. Without grace we would not be inclined to live beyond original sin; without grace, especially as found in Jesus (his Body, his Church) we would be unable to even desire it.

So how does Jesus accomplish this? Why is it important for Jesus to have both God's Will and a human will? What does it mean? Genesis tells us we are created in 'the image and likeness of God'; Paul tells us that we are part of the Body, meaning that we share in the nature of Jesus, and as long as we remain part of the Body, we have the ability to be the Will of God as well (c.f. also *1 John 4:14-15*). So humans have within themselves both the divine spark and the freedom to act upon it. Remember that the Law is not a series of dictates but a relationship with God. God has placed within us every necessary understanding and ability to follow His Law and has fully reveal. We also have the ability to, because we have within us the divine spark, to make decisions, free decisions. Recall that under the Law, the Law which Jesus fulfills, freedom is not the freedom to do whatever we want or to decide this or that but the ability to do God's will. True freedom comes from the free action of living the Law. There is a distinct difference between the ability of humans to reason (judgment) and the will of God (conscience). To not follow that Law pulls one away from God, slavery to sin, and ultimately is death. To not follow the fulfillment of that Law, Jesus, has the same effect.

East And West

Augustine literally died with the wolf at the door, just days before the fall of Hippo in 430, as the Vandals were besieging the gates of the city. His legacy and his teachings are a powerful witness to the strength and transition of the Church but Augustine was not without his setbacks. Several of his teachings were rejected by the Church (a big one being some of his conclusions on predestination) and it is not for another 1000 years that they are taken up by some of the reformers.

This brings up a sticky subject. With the collapse of Rome, the Church steps into the void in the Western Empire. This is not seen by those who are living it to be the 'end of the Roman Empire' as we might view it today. For them, it was just another day, albeit one in which foreigners came in and killed and maimed. The political strength of Constantinople stands in contrast to the chaos of Rome. The Church just happens to be the largest Roman institution left standing, with the same necessity for communication and exchange as the Empire it continued. But at the same time the Church is not an efficient army and protecting its interests and the interests of its flock is not as easy as it was for the previous incarnations of Rome (or Ravenna by this time). The Empire is sundered but it is not seen as gone. Constantinople in the East continues to aide Roman interests in the West. East and West exchange law, theology and spirituality for the next 500 years. But it is precisely Rome's wane which begins to cause the jurisdictional problems which will come to bear at that time.

When Rome was one Empire, with Rome as its center, then there was a certain amount of uniformity. With the separation, it reflects earlier empires which had no central focus; divergence, sometimes based on necessity, begins to creep into the mix. Within a 100 years or so of Augustine's

death (Council of Toledo, 587) the idea of the *filioque*, the ‘procession’ of the Spirit from the Father *and the Son*, is introduced to the Creed in order to combat the Arianism which was still a plague upon the Faith. Again, in a heterodox world, these differences are often tolerated for centuries. But that is not the only example. Augustine himself causes friction between East and West, just as he is the source for it later within the West. Along with that come the jurisdictional rivalries and contentions, further driving wedges between the faithful in both the East and the West. Eventually the West rises again, and the East begins to wane only furthering the distance within the unified, orthodox, and catholic Church.

Liturgy

It is during this period that many of the liturgical practices are codified, [enshrined] in such forms as the Divine Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom, still practiced today in the same form, 1500 years later.

We can understand this explosive development of liturgy from our earlier explorations. Liturgy is the expression of Faith. It contains within it many of the teachings of the Faith acted out in symbol and sign. It connects the past to the present and the present to the past. The Jewish idea of ‘memory’, the action of making present here and now, figures heavily in the liturgy of the Church. The two aspects are based in two Jewish practices: synagogue and the Seder or Passover meal. The proclamation (do not forget this is myth and ritual) of the story, the Truths through the Word and some amount of explanation comes to us from synagogue and usually comprises the first part of the liturgical service. This teaching authority requires a priesthood, which also sets up the second part of the liturgy, what is known as Eucharist. These practices also reflect what is known from the earliest practices of the Church, in which they would attend synagogue and then retire for the *agape* meal (the love feast if you will). It is understood as *agape*, the highest form of the Greek word for love, because it brings forward the very love sacrifice of Jesus. When Jesus says, ‘do this in memory of me’ he is not asking for a secular trip down memory lane but the fullness of the sacred Seder ritual – making the sacrifice *real*, here and now. It also calls us to ‘thanksgiving’ (*eucharistia*), an action of praise and worship.

This means that for the Church, as for any religion, liturgy is central; it is the expression of all she believes and professes and acts upon. The Church centers around liturgical actions, even in daily life, as did the Romans – looking to worship and patronage, that direct connection with heaven.

Monasticism

Aside from doctrinal and liturgical standards, and in part because of them, a major portion of the stability of the Western Empire has its genesis within the monastic system which developed there. Most Eastern monastic traditions were individual or hermit based (call *anchorite* or *eremitic*). With Benedict of Nursia (480-547) in the West, the communal (*cenobite*) tradition becomes the norm. The West is becoming a weak, segmented society. Infrastructure begins to fail, raiding tribes disrupt trade and communication as well as lifetimes. Intellectual and cultural exchange begins to suffer. Into the void steps monks. With their commitment to work, learning and prayer pockets of civilization manage to keep hold or be restored in such faraway places as Ireland. The Faith, given such fertile fields took root and grew. Monks preserved liturgical practices, books, and a certain amount of sanity, providing the foundation for a renewed Western civilization.

The Benedictines (as the followers of Benedict’s ‘rule’ or guidelines are called) are basically semi-autonomous communities in contrast to later orders which tend to be more centrally organized. Each is the result of a mission, called a ‘daughter house’, from another established single community, or ‘mother house’, which sustains it until it is deemed to be self-sufficient at which time it is ‘chartered’ and becomes independent. This structure, along with the power, simplicity, and ultimately the consistency of Benedict’s ‘rule’, creates a solid and compact oasis of Christianity and Christian learning

for 500 years all over the world. As the authority of the Roman Emperors collapsed, the Roman Church began to take over many of the functions of government. Of note here is Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). Gregory was very keen on the spiritual and political stability brought about by charity (as taught by Jesus) and focused on relief of refugees, feeding poor widows and orphans, and ransoming captives. He also fought to maintain some stability, both doctrinally and liturgically, sanctioning what we now call *Gregorian Chant* – the basis for western music. Also, and probably most important here, per the mandate of Christ at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, he sent missionaries to convert everyone, especially the ‘Barbarians’, a task at which he was amazingly successful. Goths, Vandals, Saxons, and even Vikings eventually converted. This meant that the ‘barbarian’ tribes, rather than totally destroying Europe, began to play some role in preserving the achievements of Rome.¹⁴ One of the main ways he accomplished this was by spreading the Benedictines everywhere.

The final aspect of Benedictines is tied to the self-sufficiency and to the rule – the monks must work as well as pray in order to support themselves. One of the many ways priors and abbots kept their monks busy and raised income was by having them copy books. Per the centrality of liturgy, abbeys had an internal need for liturgical books, like breviaries, Sacramentaries, and lectionaries, so they were well suited to the copying of texts. They also preserved many texts from antiquity, secular as well as religious or theological. The Irish particularly, with their penchant for languages, voraciously consumed and preserved any texts they came upon – especially in their missionary journeys about Europe.

Putting It All Together

What is the problem? This seems to be the question of this period. After the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists paved the way for Christianity by introducing it to the larger world, it becomes the task of the Fathers and Doctors (another term we will get to) to define, explain, and clarify the faith for the world.

That the Fathers, and Augustine in particular, have the ability to be misinterpreted or misused is a given. To say that the Fathers, Augustine in particular, have the ability to be misinterpreted or misused would be an understatement. But this in itself is the first statement to be made about theology versus doctrine. Theology is not doctrine, but is at the service of doctrine. Often people confuse the two, seeking out theological opinions which validate their personal beliefs. The confusion of belief or theological exploration with Faith, dogma, or doctrine is part and parcel of the problem of theology, and this period is its first poster child. Through theological explorations Augustine produced clearer understandings of specific doctrines, but that does not mean that everything he thought about is doctrine. At this time (and really at all times) doctrine is not the responsibility of one theologian, but of many, in concert with the full Magisterial body of the Church.

Finally, with the legalization of Christianity and its movement to the forefront, the thinking becomes that human history would reflect salvation history. All of the struggles of before would recede into the background. The political and religious leadership would spend great efforts in spreading and maintaining the Kingdom of God here on earth, giving a peace ‘not as the world gives’ but which only Christ can give. The desire to meld human thought to divine Wisdom is just as strong a desire, and in fact becomes the basis for building human history.

“The pregnant dictum of St. Augustine – ‘*Greater is the authority of Scripture than all human capacity*’ – was steadily insisted upon....But unfortunately it was very difficult to find what the ‘authority of Scripture’ really was. To the greater number of Protestant ecclesiastics it meant the authority of any meaning in the text which they had the wit to invent and the power to enforce.

¹⁴ This is also seen in the East as the Vikings begin to settle places like Moscow and Kiev in order to establish trade.

To increase this vast confusion....It was insisted by leading Catholic authorities that [the Vulgate] was as completely a product of divine inspiration as was the Hebrew original. Strong men arose to insist even that, where the Hebrew and the Latin differed, the Hebrew should be altered to fit Jerome's mistranslation.... "

Andrew Dickson White, *New Chapters in the Warfare of Science, Popular Science Monthly, June 1895*

"I will listen for what God, the LORD, has to say; surely he will speak of peace to his people and to his faithful. May they not turn to foolishness! Near indeed is his salvation for those who fear him; glory will dwell in our land. Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. "

Psalms 85:9-11

The Middle Middle: The High Middle Ages

With the collapse of the Empire, the Church steps into the void. For the next 600 or so years it becomes the stabilizing influence in the West; technically its history is the history of the West, and that history is completely aimed at bringing about the Kingdom of God. All intellectual activity becomes focused on the sacred, and per Augustine's *City of God*, on the meaning and purpose of humanity in the Kingdom. This is probably the last time where the profane and the sacred are truly in balance.

Is There A Doctor In The House?

Like others before it, the term 'Doctor of the Church' is a title received by a theologian on account of the great insight the whole Church has derived from their doctrine. In the early medieval times the doctrinal fab-fours of St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome received the title in the West and St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Athanasius, and St. Gregory Nazianzen in the East. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Anselm, and St. Peter Chrysologus were added to the list between the 16th to the 18th centuries with the likes of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Therese of Lisieux added in the 20th century. All in all, a total of 33 people have been recognized in the West by this title, with Therese being the latest in 1997

Orders

Benedictines were the first major Western 'order' (from the Latin *ordo* meaning number, row, rank, or the regular arrangement of something) of monastics, but there have been many more to follow. For our purposes two of the other major orders were Franciscan (after St. Francis of Assisi – 1181-1226) and Dominican (after St. Dominic of Osma – 1170-1221, also known as the *Order of Preachers* or the *Blackfriars*), both of which, along with the Benedictines produced many of the great philosophical and theological minds of the Middle Ages.

Pilgrims

These are not the ones you are thinking of, though there is a rock involved, in a sense. With the transfer of the bones of St. James the Apostle to Spain, the cult of saints moves out of just local areas and into the world-wide Church. As a statement to the understanding of Church as universal, and in some sense to the stability brought about by the Church in the West, masses of people began to take pilgrimages to 'holy sites' (many over-seen by monasteries), with a road, port, and way-station infrastructure still visible today.

Humanism

With this rise of 'lesisure' time, a greater sense of humanity is explored in theology and in just general studies. The term for this, *humanism*, is a misunderstood word which must be understood. Initially it merely means a concentration on things *human*, that is, the study of things which humans do specifically, considered somewhat aside from theology. Later it will come to mean a great many things, but for now it is the concentration on the non-metaphysical liberal arts.

Anselm

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) is the widest-ranged Christian thinker between Augustine (354-430) and our next guest, Thomas Aquinas. Like Aristotle, Saint Anselm thought about everything, but like

Augustine, he did so through the eyes of Faith. While the world is still seen as a sacred space, vestiges of paganism still roam the 'empire' and people began to turn to the Church's temporal power rather than its spiritual guidance. The West was returning to ascendancy and squabbles with the East over jurisdiction were rising. Even the ranks of believers are starting to jaded to the politics and the wars of the era. Anselm himself, at the age of fifteen, desired to enter a monastery but could not obtain the consent of his wealthy father, who had more worldly designs for his son. Anselm reacted with some sort of psychosomatic illness and after his 'recovery' gave up this pursuit and turned to a somewhat more carefree life. Eventually, his mother died and his father's severity increased so Anselm took off, repented, and sought out his true calling at the Benedictine abbey at Bec, France where he began to teach and write. Anselm defined theology as '*fides quaerens intellectum*' or *Faith seeking reason* (or *understanding* depending on how you choose to translate *intellectum*). This battle cry, picked up from Augustine, and that deeply sincere monastic desire, were the driving forces in his life.

His prowess and spirituality increased and eventually his teaching brought him to the notice of the papacy where he was reluctantly appointed to the archbishopric of Canterbury in England (though he was born in North Italy, and lived in France, which shows you the renewing breadth of societal structures of both the rising nations and the universal sense of the Church). A notoriously difficult assignment, Anselm managed with grace and wisdom to settle many contentious run-ins with the crown and his fellow bishops. As said, the times were such that the mixing of spiritual and temporal power grew. Kings could meddle in the affairs of Church and the Church, along with an understood dictate to guide the earthly Kingdom, was beginning to take on ambitious, politically motivated individuals, often at the politician's behest. Anselm stands in the midst of this struggle. His zeal for the spiritual Kingdom meant that he continued to push William II (1056-1100) on matters of reform and the interests of his see. Perhaps as a left over from his relationship with his father and a monastic desire for things beyond this world, he spent great effort in pedagogy, perchance trying to wrest control back to the spiritual. He rarely backed down, though the king was also fairly effective in stymieing many of his efforts. Eventually he brokered a deal which muddled many of the lines between Church and State for centuries to come.

While his political/religious acumen is legendary, his spiritual brilliance covered the widest range of theological concepts. Where Augustine pulled theology out of the apologetic phase, Anselm pulled it into the modern time. This he accomplished through any means at his disposal. Apparently he had quite the gift (and reputation) for reasonable argumentation and persuasion. Anselm was eventually challenged to argue all of his points with only appeals to reason (wisdom from God) without appeal to outside authority (i.e. Scripture and Tradition). "[I was challenged that] *nothing whatsoever in these matters should be made convincing by the authority of Scripture, but whatsoever the conclusion, through individual investigations, should assert...the necessity of reason would concisely prove, and the clarity of truth would evidently show that this is the case. They also wished that I not disdain to meet and address simpleminded and almost foolish objections that occurred to me.*" (*Monologion*: Prologue) While this may sound similar to the earlier Apologists, he is writing for people who *already* believe or at least have had explicit exposure to the ideas he is confronting. So like the apologists he has to rely on language outside of the authority of scriptural texts and tradition, but unlike them he is not just explaining but is offering 'proofs' which end any argumentation on the subject, showing the completeness of the Faith and God's plan, rationally, physically, and spiritually.

While he is most famous in this phase for having articulated the so-called "ontological argument" for the proof of God's existence, he is venerated for his doctrines among which is that on atonement, where he transforms the understanding from 'debt/ransom' to 'satisfaction/honor' (c.f. *Cur Deus Homo*). Basically, in the current thinking, the 'debt' St. Paul speaks of was thought to need to be paid to Satan, but Anselm argued that sin is against God's infinite *justice* (partially because what could God owe Satan?), a debt so great that humanity could not even begin to pay it back. Humanity must be completely released from sin (think back to Augustine's re-balancing by Christ), and Christ's death is

infinitely greater than all of humanity's past, present, and future sins combined. God owes us (Creation) nothing – all is gift; it is us who owe Him everything, and Christ who over-balances the scales in our favor.

Still it is the 'proofs for God' for which he is probably most remembered (a shame). These are not proofs in the *scientific* sense but in the *logical* sense. Basically he argues an end-of-the-road scenario, with the proof being that God is the thing of which nothing greater can be thought (*quo maius cogitari non potest*). Anselm first asks whether such a thing can exist, that is, is there an end of the line to human thinking. He takes as his clue the Fool of the *Psalms* 'has said in his heart that there is no God' (*Psalm 14*). So the opposite of foolishness, reason, must show that there *is* a God. We can tie this in with the above arguments, as nothing is greater than God, the Creator *ex nihilo*, of which even Satan is a part. God controls Creation – even Satan, as the Garden story tells us. Still free will is not diminished because it is part of God's justice, the over-whelming gift of love which we call life.

Proof

Speaking of proof, now is probably as good as any to address that simple question. For the most part, Anselm does not inhabit a world which needed 'proof' of God; everything it understood was in terms of the existence of God. God was the Creator. In Christ "we live and move and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*). Jesus was God. The Church is the visible Body of Christ, both on earth and in heaven. Proof therefore is not a problem. The Mystical and miraculous are not questioned within the profane world because it is surrounded by the sacred – it is the Kingdom of God, and we participate in that Kingdom.

Still, the intellect seeks satisfaction. Anselm's bow to humanism, with his 'proofs' can be seen as outside of this understanding – as it is today. Dun Scotus' (1265-1308) later proof is not one-upmanship, but is a continuation of Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*. Dun Scotus' thinking (c.f. *Opus Oxoniense*) is merely more broadly based, being more based in the philosophical concept of 'cause'. God, as the Creator, infinite against the finite Creation, is the Prime Cause. Simply put¹⁵, because there cannot be an infinite regression of causes there must be a 'first cause'; that first cause must be perfect, that is, without dependences (dependence being an imperfection) of any kind, once again proving that there must be a first cause because of the *possibility* of a first cause. Finally, all events in the universe follow a similar design, so the first cause is the pattern upon which all other causes rely. Basically it is a further and broader version of Anselm's arguments.

Islam

Part of the reason for this upswing in thought is that during this time the two-edged sword of Islam arrives. On the one edge, the physical and spiritual defense of the 'empire' is at stake, both of which spur deeper and broader demands upon theology. On the other, some of this expansion of thinking as manifested in Anselm and Dun Scotus is due to the re-arrival on the Western scene of copies of the works of earlier Greek thinkers. With Augustine, the West pretty much relied on the thinking of Plato to provide a language for doctrinal exploration. Aristotle begins to wane because there is no perceived need to keep him around, as no one was really able to reconcile some of his thinking with Christianity, as they could do with Plato. But with the deepening of thought through the Middle Ages, a different breed of theologians develops, what are known as 'Scholastics' from the Latin *schola*, basically meaning 'school'.

Aquinas

¹⁵ Once again: very simply put...

The greatest of the Scholastics, in fact the one almost exclusively associated with the term, is Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Thomas was born in central Italy in sight of the home base of the Benedictines, Monte Casino. At an early age he began studies and was a product of the newly developing system of university education. He studied with Albert Magnus among others, entered the Dominican order, and finally ended up in Paris. It is the perfect storm of learning. Theological and philosophical thought is being revisited. The (re)introduction of Aristotle meant that the questions which had seemed to be answered for so long were being re-examined in a new light, especially with the rise of ‘science’ (at least as Aristotle understood it as *causal knowledge*). Because he is driven by the same things which drove Augustine and the other Church Fathers and Councils before him – the idea that any re-questioning needed to be put to rest in light of new thinking – this is his motivation, not the need to debunk earlier thinking.

So while some of Thomas’ thought may have been seen as ‘radical’ at the time, he was following closely in the footsteps of those before him, answering the same questions in a different way and was not about abandoning earlier thought. Think of it more as providing yet another nail into the coffin of doubt. But due to his reliance on Aristotelian thought he also explored questions which were of a nature that perhaps would never be asked under the Neo-Platonic/Augustinian schools. For Thomas, though he used new means, did not lose sight of the Church or the Faith: truth is known through reason (natural revelation) and Faith (supernatural revelation).

His great works *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* earned him both praise and ridicule but are without question, not just standards but rank among some of the most important and comprehensive theological works in history. Another work titled *Compendium of Theology*, unfinished with his death, is a concise and ‘popular’ retelling of his *Summa* work. It is somewhat amazing in light of the fact that the now four volume *Summa Theologica* was originally intended as *introductory* material before students took his class, making the *Compendium* an introduction to the introduction. With that in mind we get a sense of the mind of Aquinas.

The other major work *Summa Contra Gentiles* (where Gentiles really means ‘unbelievers’), was written as an apologetic work for the Jews and Moors in Spain. One of its important arguments is that no empirical truth (science) is opposed to revealed truth (Faith). This is perhaps the genius of Thomas. Aristotle’s empiricism (that knowledge comes through experience and the senses) is applicable to both empirical, human reason and Divine Reason. Thomas takes pains to explain the difference between the human and the divine, but at the same time acknowledges that, per revelation, both are present within humans. He does not lose Augustine’s and Anselm’s Platonic idealism (the fact that knowledge has a universal, external aspect aside from sensual experience), but he extends it into the empirical human realm. Plato, as an ‘idealist’ saw the world as a reflection of perfect ‘Forms’, which gave shape and form to ‘real’ things. Aristotle was more of a ‘realist’, that is, that the thing in itself gives definition to the overall idea. Thomas sees the two as complimentary, both necessary for human understanding.

We can see this in his introductory comments of the *Summa Theologica*, where he ‘proves’ that, alongside the knowledge which natural reason gives, Revelation also is *necessary* for salvation. Primarily, because, while we can grasp physical death, it there is no way to know the *supernatural end* to which voluntary acts are ordered and secondly, because, without Revelation, even the truths concerning God which could be proved by reason would be widely known "*only by a few, after a lot time, and with the admixture of many errors*" due to the aforementioned deficiency of judgment. Only after revealed truths have been accepted, can the mind then proceed to understand them and, from them, to draw conclusions. This means that theology is a science because has its ultimate basis in principles that are certain. Similar to Aristotle’s understanding of metaphysics, metaphysics/theology is the first science because the object of this science, the end for which we engage in theology, is God. All other things are considered only in so far as they relate to God. So, in keeping with those before him, he argues that reason is used in theology not to prove the truths of the Faith (which are completely without question

on the authority of God), but to *defend*, explain, and deepen our understanding of those revealed doctrines.

Reason, will, Hope, and Faith all grind together. There is no separate categories, no point at which the human is separate from the divine. So the first aim of theology is to help us to know “*God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the Beginning of all things, and the End of all, especially of rational creatures*”. Only after that and only in light of that do we examine anything to do with humanity – and that only then in terms of “*the rational creature's advance towards God*”. And of course all of this must be understood in terms of the progression of humanity ultimately to God through “*Christ, Who, as Man, is the way by which we tend to God.*” As we can see, while using human reason to explore these topics, he is not concerned with the exercise which Anselm dallies in of using reason alone. Love is the ultimate, and really does not need to be explained; ‘God is Love’ John tells us and so really the only things we have to deeply understand are the other cardinal virtues of Faith and Hope. But these are not things to be called into question, merely understood, and then put into practice. “*...Faith has to do with things that are not seen and Hope with things that are not possessed.*” (all cites are from *Summa Theologica*)

Bonaventure

The Franciscan Giovanni di Fidanza, aka Bonaventure (1221- 1274), was a contemporary and friend of Aquinas. A scholar in Paris, like Thomas, he was appointed, in 1257, to Minister General of the Franciscans (something akin to ‘pope’ of the Franciscans). So, like Anselm before him, his efforts became divided between theology and secular concerns. Still, he produced works of magnitude, mysticism, and gentleness, not in a form like Thomas’ *Summa* but mainly in spiritual works, lectures, and homilies. And whereas Thomas’s understanding of Aristotle was very precise, Bonaventure’s was much more general, working in broad strokes, much like this work. Bonaventure is probably best categorized as an Aristotelian in his philosophical principles, but Augustinian in his conclusions. The truths which it reveals, according to his view, are peculiarly adapted to influence the rational and emotional drives within us, and so he too regards theology as a *practical science*.

Aristotle distinguished *practical science* – concerned with human actions like politics and ethics – from *theoretical science* – concerned with knowledge like physics, mathematics and metaphysics. Bonaventure distinguishes Faith, by which God works through grace, from both philosophy and theology, which work through the human mind (though even there God is not absent). Theology is the perfection of the sciences because it addresses both sides, both the practical and the theoretical. In and of themselves neither theoretical knowledge nor practical deeds get to the center of the moral life, which is love – both the “affection” of love and the theological virtue of Charity (also called ‘Love’). Within us, theology is active, that is, the pursuit of truth is part of divine worship. There is therefore a distinct relation to reason and Faith. Therefore, all the sciences are but the handmaids of theology.

Reason has the ability, completely on its own, to imperfectly discover some of the moral truths which form the groundwork of the Christian system; we can see this in statements made by other religions or by philosophers. Like all mysteries though, it requires divine revelation to come to complete understanding and to know all of the other doctrines. Logical reasoning must be supplemented by prayer and exercise of the virtues, that is, putting it right with God thereby disposing it to openness to the truth, and with any luck rendering it fit to even rise even to ecstatic union with God, and that is the key. The supreme end of life is to be one with God, and all we are should be directed there. It cannot be entirely reached in this life but remains as a hope for the future. So in this, the mind plays an important role and we have the ability though the grace and the nature of Creation to rise up from the imperfect and purely physical knowledge of God, through wonder and awe at the sensual world, through rational exploration and finally through joining to the mind of God, pure intellect to full understanding.

Bonaventure's writings manifest his profound respect for tradition. Still, to be sure, Bonaventure like all the Scholastics and as noted many theologians before him, occasionally put forward opinions not strictly kosher in regard to questions not yet defined or clearly settled. Once again, this does not diminish their efforts or call into question all of their thought; it also, however, does not mean that everything they wrote can be used for argument against certain doctrines or as justification for those arguments. Arguments are always ultimately subject to Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, all of which are the true measure of the profundity or applicability of any thought.

Bonaventure was particularly noted in his day as a man with the rare ability to reconcile diverse traditions in theology and philosophy. He was able with gentleness and humility to unit different doctrines in a synthesis cemented with his personal notion of knowledge of the truth as the road to the love of God. Whether it was on subjects of theology, jurisdiction, mendicant orders versus secular clergy – you name it, he had influence and was respected. Speaking of respect, even in Islam, in a return of the favor St. Bonaventure was widely regarded by early Muslim thinkers as one of the greatest Christian theologians.

Augustine Versus Aquinas

No this is not the fight of the century, though perhaps there are those who wish to make it so century after century. Simply, Augustine points more toward Platonic and Aquinas toward Aristotle. But we saw that really there is no fight of idealism and realism in the minds of these men. While human judgment is lacking, it is perfected in Christ within conscience. [Bonaventure and St. Thomas, while in a sense the complement of the other, were of a different bent of mind; each had qualities in which he excelled; each supplied what the other lacked. Thomas was analytical (something being true by definition) in his approach, Bonaventure synthetical (something being true via construction of perceptions and observations); Thomas was 'rational', Bonaventure was more 'touchy-feely'; Thomas was the Christian Aristotle, Bonaventure a true Augustinian; Thomas was the teacher of the scholarly arts, Bonaventure of the practical life; Thomas enlightened the mind, Bonaventure inflamed the heart; Thomas extended the Kingdom of God by the love of theology, Bonaventure by the theology of love.

Putting It All Together

This time sees the stabilization of the West, and a movement away from the feudal system and into kingdom building. The kingdoms of England and France benefit from location and a great desire of the popes to settle Christianity into these areas. The German princes do not coalesce in the same manner and Italy remain torn asunder by wealthy principalities and struggle against outside forces intent upon outright control of the peninsula. Christian Spain, cut off from the support (and woes) of the rest of Europe, begins to have trouble of its own with the expansion into the West of Islam.

What we really see in these thinkers is the growing sense of humanity, manifesting itself in *humanism* and the offshoot of that, 'scientific' thinking produced by exposure to Aristotle's writings. The Rise of rationalism and a basis in *skepticism* (from Greek *skepsis* meaning 'enquiry'), the practice of starting as if one does not have any knowledge of something. So Anselm has 'proofs' for God, and Aquinas begins his exploration with the question of God.

"No matter how simple a man may be, the obvious cannot go on astonishing him forever."

Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

"The end of all my labors has come. All that I have written appears to me as much straw after the things that have been revealed to me."

Thomas Aquinas (from a letter)

Schism and Renewal

When one looks at the nature of Christianity, one must understand its roots, but it must also understand its branches. The world in which Anselm was born was different than the in which he and Aquinas lived, for the simple reason that by then the East and the West had finally sundered; there was no longer a fully universal Church.

The Not-So-Great Great Schism

There exists a liturgical phrase that goes “...that from East to West a perfect offering may be made”. The sense of the Church as universal (*catholic*) and as encompassing all loyal Christians (*orthodox*) is bound up in this idea of “from East to West”. From east to west is the direction and track of the sun through the sky and is therefore representative of ‘everywhere’, as Christ is the sun and he is everywhere and at all time. It is ironic that the split of East and West creates a situation where the Son has trouble ‘moving’ from East to West. This is known officially as the ‘Great Schism’ because it was a sundering of Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

The proper terms ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Catholic’ have already been somewhat explored, but here they have very specific meaning and taking a moment can really help to make the differences clear. *Orthodox* implies static, once-and-for-all understandings of things. It seeks stability over change, with the understanding that once a matter is settled it is not open for more discussion. This means that the Truth is the Truth is the Truth and it presents itself as a solid foundation upon which to act. *Catholic* implies a far-ranging, dynamic, updatable understanding of solid truths. It seeks outreach and adaptability over static understanding, meaning not that the Truth is open to constant interpretation but that it presents itself as a living dynamic Truth to each generation and situation.

At the risk of great harm and trivialization¹⁶ we can reduce all of the reasons for the Great Schism down to two main factors: *Jurisdiction* and *Theology*. The two examples of them are Papal authority (pope being the bishop in Rome) and the ‘*filioque* clause’ added to the Latin translation of the Nicæan Creed. First, the idea of jurisdiction, some of which we have already covered (*Chapter 12*). Initially there were only a few ‘patriarchies’ Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria which had jurisdiction over the ‘metropolitans’ or the churches in all of the other cities surrounding them. Eventually Jerusalem (the sentimental favorite) and Constantinople (the capital of the Eastern Empire or *Byzantium*¹⁷) were added to the list. Each of the original three had some ‘claim’ to jurisdiction in that they were major centers of learning and population; this all made sense in terms of the hierarchical nature of the episcopate. Rome had the additional claims of the death place for Peter *and* Paul as well as being the jurisdictional capital of the whole Empire, until it was split by Constantine.

With that split and the rise of Constantinople (established around 330) in opposition to Rome, squabbles naturally developed over the control of the Catholic Orthodox churches (i.e. which bishops were over which diocese, etc.). Temporal jurisdictional concerns do not mix well with spiritual ones. As Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria fell to the Muslims starting in the 7th century these contentions became more prevalent. Sees and churches do not disappear just because the Muslims occupy the

¹⁶ But when has that stopped us before?

¹⁷ While we speak of East and West and Roman and Byzantine these distinctions are somewhat fluid; for example southern Italy remained part of the Byzantine Empire until it was conquered by the Lombards.

areas. Which patriarch had authority? There was some precedent for Rome, where at times over the years all had turned to her for settling doctrinal matters¹⁸, but did doctrinal authority extend to jurisdictional authority? Even this precedent was called into question when Constantinople began to rise in offset to Rome's decline in power. An example was the unopposed establishment of courts which gave Constantinople a broad legal jurisdiction throughout the empire. The mixing of legal and spiritual lines and power, especially with the growing external pressures being exerted on the West, led to a decline in Roman influence outside (and to a degree inside) of the empire. Eventually claims of Ecumenical Patriarch were made by both parties which sat well with neither; Rome in decline was seen as grasping at a last vulgar bid for power and Constantinople in ascendancy was seen as the young upstart.¹⁹

Poisoning The Well

But other than jurisdictional wrangling, what other impact did it have? The aforementioned jurisdictional structure meant that a certain amount of diversity existed in and was tolerated by the magisterial leaders. Heresy was fought and suppressed, but practices and some teachings, while were not universally held, were still 'tolerated' at some level. One such was the *filioque* (Latin meaning 'and the son') clause added to the Nicene Creed during the Council of Toledo in the 6th century. The Arian questioning of the divinity of Jesus and the translation of the word 'procession' in light of several passages in the Gospel of John lead to some 'confusion' or if you prefer 'disagreement' about the 'procession' of the Spirit.²⁰ The West decided to settle both issues by adding *filioque* to the *Latin translation* of the Nicene Creed (it is not part of the original Greek). This may not seem like much but understanding the importance of creeds is vital. Once again: the Creed, as the measure of orthodoxy, is seen as important as Scripture for profession, transmission, and regulation of the Truth. Though tolerated for centuries while theologians wrestled with the subtleties, it eventually became a poster child for the problems of the East and the West, but even then it was still not a deal breaker.

In due course, when all of the factors began coming to a head, demands for final answers on such things as jurisdiction and theological differences were made and were pressed until satisfaction was rendered. Briefly, and without a lot of explanation on my part, in 1054, excommunications were issued for individuals which became understood as extended to everyone and 'normal' communication ceased. While politico/religious cooperation continued on both sides before and after the schism, isolation drove a wedge between all of the parties. Eventually the Byzantine Empire became surrounded by Muslims and began to decline in power as control of trade routes shifted and Christians in the area became outnumbered by Muslims. The West, finally out of the throes of invasion and plague began to regain its intellectual legacy as well as some juicy trade routes and trade agreements with the Muslims (another slap at Constantinople). Feeling a sense of power again the West began asserting its jurisdictional rights once more, and felt empowered to save the world once again: a little travelogue we like to call *The Crusades*.

The Crusades that took place over the years were of mixed results, except perhaps for the Fourth which had the effect of sacking Constantinople in 1204. This had the effect of opening up Constantinople for the Muslims to be able to rename it Istanbul, which as you might imagine has left a bad taste in the mouth of the Orthodox for the last 800 years or so.

¹⁸ Recognized during the period of the first seven Ecumenical Councils from 325 to 787.

¹⁹ One avoids the euphemism 'young Turk' for obvious reasons....

²⁰ Chapter 14 has Jesus seeming to ask the Father for the Spirit (John 14:16) and Chapter 15 has Jesus sending the Spirit from the Father (John 15:26) whereas Chapter 20 has Jesus breathing the Spirit out (John 20:22).

Left to their own devices for so many years, East and West developed many separate traditions and practices. As West began to coalesce into the Catholic Church we recognize today, the East remained segmented in the various national churches we see today. These would include Greek, Russian, Serbian, and Coptic in Egypt among others.

Divining Rod

The West, with its emphasis on developing 'intellectual' and theological concepts (over what we would consider now as 'scientific'), adaptability, and missionary zeal succeeded in spreading into areas all around the known world whereas the East had to hunker down and protect itself from what it perceived as a threat from a growing Muslim (and others) population, the same sort of things the West had contended with for centuries. The West focused on dynamic spreading of the Gospel, often 'adapting' local customs and beliefs, broadening the understanding of 'catholic'. The East focused on preserving the 'orthodoxy' of Christianity from all threats. The evangelical spread of the Catholic Church into the traditional Orthodox areas was seen as proselytizing and an invasion of the sovereignty of the Orthodox churches. And the farther that the Roman Church spread the larger the jurisdictional area became.

We can see the effects of these policies in the churches that exist today. Orthodoxy (like Greek and Russian) has shrunk down to small populations whereas Roman Catholicism has spread around the world. This is not a condemnation or commentary on Orthodoxy, as that expansion has a dark side, with many heresies and controversies rising out of such a dynamic, non-orthodox theological approach. Coupled with the intermixing of the spiritual and temporal power which both East and West practiced, power conflicts arose that continued on in the West long after the fall of the East, with Kings making bishops and Popes making kings. Monasteries, havens for those wishing to step back from the world became cities for wealthy children, with abbots wielding great temporal, economic, and spiritual power. The unity of the East and West was never really a question until the division of the empire by Constantine. There certainly were disagreements and refuge given to exiles of controversy, but there remained an understanding of unity. The unity rested in an understanding of authority and collegiality in the Church. While ecumenical councils point to the unity of the Church they also speak to the autonomy of churches within the Church.

Re-Form

Many things came from this split, and many attempts have been made over time to reconcile the differences and re-form the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Two endeavors of note are the Council of Lyons in 1274 brokered by Bonaventure (and on the way to which Thomas Aquinas fell ill and died) at which the Greek and Latin churches were (briefly) reconciled, and the Council of Florence begun in 1431 which successfully negotiated reunification with several Eastern Churches (known now variously as the *Eastern Catholic* or *Byzantine Rite* Churches), mainly in exchange for what the Byzantine emperor could no longer provide: protection against the Turks. One final effect of this Council was the utter rejection by the Russian Orthodox Church of the West *and* the East, a division which also exists even to this day. Western military assistance to Byzantium never materialized, resulting in the final fall of Constantinople in 1453 and a truly final break with the West.²¹

Out of all this we must pull the fact that for over 10 centuries the Church stood as one and that even for four centuries more is stood at least in solidarity and the six after that in an uneasy truce at best. It is

²¹ Some hold this failure/success to the sole efforts of Mark of Ephesus, the lone Eastern bishop who in the defense of orthodoxy did not sign the decrees of Florence – he is considered a Saint in the East but not in the West.

a mistake to see the Church as a merely Western Invention, even though the character that most are familiar with is Western in nature. It is also a mistake to see it as an invention of Constantine, as the measures which he enforced were already in place. The line of the Church has not broken in 20 centuries even though it has been fragmented; East and West still share many Scriptural, Tradition, Magisterial, doctrinal, and spiritual commonalities.

The Late Middle

How does the Church fare after such a cataclysmic event, especially as a pre-cursor for the splintering to come? “Very well, thank you” is the most likely reply. On the upside, Europe is crawling out of feudalism; on the other hand it is caught in the throes of nation building, with the Western Church is beginning to take on a somewhat nationalistic character reminiscent of the Eastern Churches but mixed in with politics. Western architecture and art hits unfathomed heights, and yet the university system is pulling away from direct association with the Church.

Still, the everyday believer continued to be surrounded by the sense of the sacred. Music, drama, literature (like the universities) are beginning to be separated from the Church, but they still relied on sacred themes and motifs. Nonetheless behind this, with the rise in study of the liberal arts the rise of humanism as the idea that human reason and experience have merit and a bit of self-sufficiency begins to take hold. God reveals himself in works of nature and human reason. Nature as well as ritual leads one to God.

A Laugh A Minute

Several factors from this period give us this insight into the mind of the time. The first, literature, shows the growth of the vernacular (common tongue) as the medium for writing. The first major work in Italian, Dante’s (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy*, the massive poem narrating a journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, breaks onto the scene with its message of mastering one’s own nature by submitting to the commands of human reason and sacred Truth wrapped up in an epic tale which still influences thinking about heaven, purgatory, and hell to this day. It presents, in poetic form, a vision, a spiritual journey, a commentary on life, politics, and psychology, and a synthesis of the then still revolutionary theology of St Thomas Aquinas. Chaucer’s (1343-1400) *Canterbury Tales*, in English, with their tongue and cheek look at laity, clergy, and religious, as well as the whole pilgrimage trade shows us a growing sense of ‘familiarity breeding contempt’. Petrarch with his notion of the continuity between classicism and Christianity, seal the ideas of humanism and individuality outside of a completely theological framework.

A Plague On Both Your Houses

About this time, the next factor hits Europe with a double whammy: starvation and plague. With the collapse of feudalism and the rise of cities, what little land management there was fell by the way-side. The growing populations of the cities, unable to feed themselves and dependent more and more on less and less farmers were further ravaged by a run of really bad weather, which worsened the already meager crop output. In a population weakened by starvation, the Black Plague (1348-1359) ran rampant through the wet, crowded, poorly designed cities and towns, decimating the population of Europe and bringing the final nail into the coffin of feudalism and re-solidifying the metropolitan nature of Europe.

Which brings up what until now was not a schism: the sacred and science. Religion seems unable to stem the tide of evil. Many practices which are nowadays labeled ‘medieval’ surprisingly got their start during this medieval period. Many of the actions now labeled as superstitious or ignorant began as appeals to the sacred. The ‘science’ of this period (per the Aristotelian and therefore Scholastic definition) depended upon metaphysical explanations and therefore metaphysical solutions. A deep

devotion to the sufferings of Christ, an uptake in concern with eschatological things, especially the Book of Revelation, physical mortification for the sake of holiness, as well as an understandable concentration on unworthiness, sin and death among other things, increases setting a stage for later criticism.

Based in the ineffectiveness of human compassion, human rationality is seen as the solution.

Marco...Polo...

Probably in a bid to get out of town, this period also sees an explosion of exploration. Italian merchants, establishing dominance on both land and sea, open up the Far East not only to trade but to Christianity. The Continents and island of America come into sharp focus and become added to the map of the world, which also shift many of the classical ideas and notions about the earth.

Jean D'Arc

Back home, England and France are the two truly functional powerhouses in the West, albeit in a kind of incestuous kind of way. Still they are in internal turmoil by rival claims to jurisdiction by both the English and the French crowns. The Hundred Years war takes a toll on both countries just in case there would be too many people for the Black Death to kill later.

Which bring us to strange bedfellows: miracles and politics. If one examines the canon of saints from this period, one sees an interesting conglomeration. There are many levels of political and religious reformers, education and poverty driven ministries, but we will take a moment and look at two, not necessarily in historical order. One a young French girl the other a gallant who even gave the French pause; both of whom seems to blur those lines for some and cross those lines for others

At the age of 13, Joan of Arc after much understandable resistance, convinced the heir to the French throne Charles, that God and His saints had spoken to her in visions and sent her to specifically save France from England during that same Hundred Years' War. She led the French to several military victories over the English in 1429. Joan was eventually captured by the English, abandoned by the French and burned at the stake in 1431 as a witch, or in retaliation for all of the English losses she incurred – take your pick. Born into poverty, she never learned to read or write though she was skilled in sewing and spinning. Her ardent faith, simplicity, and honesty made a favorable impression on the learned churchmen who examined her initial claim. She is considered a mystic full of faith and vision, whose noted piety struck even her English judges and gained her a lot of sympathy. Eventually championed by the French, the universal Church 're-tried' her in a later more favorable time and all, including the English, now honor her as a saint.

Thomas a'Becket

England had a legacy created by Anselm. The compromise which allowed Anselm to return from exile and saved Henry from excommunication became the model for settling similar disputes in other countries. Basically it gave the Church power over the bestowal of the episcopal staff and ring, the symbols of *spiritual jurisdiction*, but left the king with practically undiminished control over the selection of bishops and the *temporal jurisdiction*. Thomas Becket (1118-1170) was the close personal friend and subject of the first Henry so much so that it was said that there was but one heart and one mind between them.

Thomas was brash and ambitious, and eventually resolved himself to a career in the Church. Thomas was appointed the archbishop of Canterbury by Henry who perhaps saw in this kindred spirit an easy ally in all of his 'reform' desires. It is possible that Becket's influence was responsible, in part, for the admirable reforms which Henry enacted, namely, his measures to put in place more equitable dealing for all his subjects by establishing a uniform and efficient system of law. But it was not so for many other attempts by Henry which affected Becket directly. Thomas seems to have 'gotten religion' suddenly, and

began, like Anselm before him, to take deep and abiding interest not so much in the king's favor as that of his see. Eventually he was murdered in his own cathedral by four knights who took a bit too seriously a passing statement by the king that he wished to be rid of him. It is accepted that Thomas was killed because he too often sided with the pope instead of the king. Unfortunately for Henry, Becket's murder enraged the common people who deemed him a martyr and they lashed out against the king which weakened him in his power struggle with Rome.

From this we can see the difference in the politico/ecclesial power structure between Anselm and Thomas. As much trouble as Anselm was, there would never have been an attempt to kill a cleric. But time shows the degradation of Church standing against the state. As an unforeseen effect of this weakening of Church by the State, even the king is challenged and that great capitulation of John in 1215, the *Magna Carta*, enshrined the idea of the separation of Church and State and additionally limited the Church's power.

Papal Decline

Caught in the fracas between much more powerful kings, the papacy and its jurisdictional concerns becomes embroiled in Italian, French, German, and some English political machinations. With kings controlling many of the bishoprics and abbeys and therefore much of the Church's properties, reform became more and more difficult, with most efforts centered mainly in local areas through local councils without ecumenical (universal) appeal or authority. Without the strong, central influence of the Pope, reform in the West became a patchwork quilt of the good and the bad, the seams of which were easily ripped. Eventually, the French king, Philip IV (1268-1314), backed by other external groups, and partially for 'protection of the papacy', forced the Pope to give up control of civil affairs and after the election of an inside man, move to Avignon, France. The following popes were Frenchmen. People began to think that the papacy was subordinate to the French king and therefore had no bearing or authority.

The earlier necessary uptake of authority by the papacy ended with the confusion of temporal authority with moral authority and weakened the papacy almost beyond repair. The glories of the art, music, architecture, theology, and literature that the Church had sustained and nourished, withered as humanism supplanted spiritual authority. The Church, which had become the world was now becoming subject to it. Eventually a further schism took place with the eventual election of a second pope, in opposition to the Avignon papacy, which caused a third pope to be elected, as an alternative to the other two. Eventually the schism was solved with the deposing of those three and the election of Martin V (1417), who restored the papacy to Rome.

As an interesting side note, this period of time became known as the *Babylonian Exile*.

Putting It All Together

East and West; the loss of unity is incalculable. The questioning of the legitimacy of authority begins a chain reaction. The World changes; the rigidity of ritual and creeds sometimes cannot overcome the ambitions of humanity which seeks to supplant God's will with their own. The limits of spiritual power in the world, the call for love and compassion can be twisted in the desire and disorder of temporal power. When the Church was small and only had to handle the affairs of the Church and not the affairs of State, the world's influence was slight. The expansion of human understanding and exploration brings the Church into direct confrontation with the profane and challenges the understanding of the Kingdom.

The schisms of this period help to define the growing disorder of the Church in the world, fragmenting and weakening its spiritual authority. With the questioning of authority comes the confusion of determining what the true anchor is. But still, we can see both sides: the positive effects of this period and the negative effects. Each advancement has a boon and a cost: universities; liberal arts; laws; the state system, and nationalism, as well as some attempt at separation of church and state;

cities as commercial rather than political and religious centers; a history of ceaseless borrowing, adaptation, and change: whole peoples, once separate like the Romans, Franks, Normans, Anglo-Saxons, Celts, and Visigoths have mingled, fought and reappeared in new forms, many of which we still recognize half a millennia later.

"It's wrong to deprive someone else of a pleasure so that you can enjoy one yourself, but to deprive yourself of a pleasure so that you can add to someone else's enjoyment is an act of humanity by which you always gain more than you lose."

"It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world but for Wales?"

St. Thomas More