

CHRISTIANITY IN THE 5TH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

As we move into the 5th century, the last in our series on the Church this month, we are also moving into a century of momentous events in the Empire, and momentous leaders of the Church. It witnessed the fall of Rome and the death of the Western Roman Empire. But it also produced such colossal figures as Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose of Milan, and Patrick of Ireland, and saw the conversion of Clovis of France. It is a century of huge consequence for the future of the Church in the West. The story of Byzantium must be left to another time and teacher, as well as that of the Syriac Church in the East. Though hopefully, we'll have time to mention one further General Council of the Church, the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451, which had a significant impact on the relations between the Churches of Asia and those of Europe.

Let's start with three of the centuries most crucial leaders: Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine with a brief look as well at John Chrysostom. Unfortunately, we can only briefly engage each one due to limitations of an hour's class. They are each unique in their own way.

I. JEROME

Of the three we'll consider at the beginning of the class, by far the least likeable was Jerome. We'll get him out of the way first. He had a nasty temperament, castigated fellow Christian leaders who disagreed with him, and probably was ill smelling, as at some periods of his life, he seldom washed. He was born in **348 and died in 420**, which of course makes him a part of our century. And his greatest work was that which came near the turn of the century, so we'll claim him for this class. Jerome struggled mightily with two personal weaknesses. The first was his love of classical literature—he loved Cicero and worried at one point of his life that when he came before the Judge at the end of time and he was asked what he was, that his claim to being a Christian would be rejected and that he would be accused of being a **Ciceronian**, that is, an adept of the Roman writer Cicero. He actually dreamed this. He resolved at that point to study scripture and scripture alone, but he could never quite give up his love of classical writing and attempted to copy Cicero's lovely Latin style, which was a good thing undoubtedly for the translation of the Bible for which he became famous in later life. His second struggle was with lustful thoughts. Apparently it never occurred to him to marry. He tried to conquer these thoughts by devoting himself to the monastic life, but he only made it three years, realized that life wasn't quite for him, and wondered if he might conquer the flesh by replacing these unwanted thoughts with intense study. He thought he'd try the Hebrew language which seemed to him a barbaric one, but one which God had used nevertheless for inspiring the Old Testament, so, he decided to give God a chance on this one and plunged himself into the study of Hebrew. He became the personal secretary of **Bishop Damascus of Rome** who suggested to him what would become his life work, the

translation of the Scriptures into Latin. He was supported in his work by a ring of 5 female disciples some of whom became students of Greek and Hebrew as well. When Damascus died, Jerome and a wealthy lady friend named Paula left for Palestine where, Paula, founded a female monastery, and Jerome one for men. Their habits were not severe asceticism but rather a life based on scholarship and study. He corresponded widely, investigated thoroughly, and soon became an expert **in textual criticism**, that is, the determination of which texts in Greek and Hebrew were most reliable through comparison with other ancient texts and manuscripts that Jerome would dig up from far and near. This allowed him to base his work of translation on earlier and better texts than the faulty Latin translations which were already circulating and were based on the Septuagint--an early translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek finished in 132 B.C. What Jerome and his collaborators produced in the end was a superlative Latin translation which became the foundational Scriptures of the Western Church throughout the Middle Ages and well into the modern era. It is called, of course, the **VULGATE**. Interestingly, at the beginning, he had trouble getting it accepted. People already studied the scriptures in other Latin translations, they had their favorite texts, and it bothered them that Jerome should think himself better than the Greek Septuagint, the Greek text of the Old Testament upon which the translations into Latin they read were based. Augustine, a contemporary, himself was upset, but Jerome's tenacious and contrary nature won out in the end, and so did the Church since what he bequeathed was a vast improvement and blessing, until such time as scholars came who learned the same science of textual criticism that Jerome used, and did for our modern age what Jerome had done for his.

II. AMBROSE

The next Christian leader I'd like to take a peek at, is Ambrose, bishop of Milan. We'll just be brief. Ambrose is interesting for three reasons. The first has to do with the manner in which he was elected bishop; the second his willingness to face down power, and the third his role in the conversion of the greatest Christian of the age, Augustine of Hippo.

Ambrose, at the time of his accession to the post of Bishop of Milan, a city north of Rome, was **governor** of that city. This was a time when the Arian/Nicene controversy was still at full tilt. When the bishop of Milan, an Arian, died, there was high tension in the city as some wanted another Arian, and some wanted someone who supported the Nicene Creed. Only eight years later bishops would gather for the Council of Constantinople and reaffirm the Nicene Creed and elaborate on it, but at this time, it was still unclear how things would go, and Milan was an important bishopric. It was the year 373 and an election was occurring for the post of bishop or principle pastor of the church in that city. Ambrose decided to attend in order to keep things from turning into a riot. As governor, he was known for his fair and efficient rule and was very popular, as well as being a skilled speaker. When he sensed things were getting tense, he stood up in front of

the assembly and spoke with such assurance and reason that calm was restored. Suddenly a child cried out: “Ambrose! Bishop!” And soon the whole crowd was crying out: “Ambrose, Bishop! Ambrose, Bishop!” Ambrose, who had no desire for the post, made himself scarce and tried to flee the city; but when the Western Emperor heard that he had been voted in by acclamation, he agreed that this was a lovely idea, and made it known to Ambrose that he would be very displeased if he persisted in his attempts to avoid these duties. So, Ambrose accepted. He was only a catechumen at the time, not even baptized, so the rite was duly performed, and he was hurried through the various ranks of the church in eight days, ordained, and undertook the study of theology. This he soon mastered, becoming one of the greatest theologians of his day. His speaking, apparently, was spell binding. One of Ambrose’s preaching themes was how true strength subsisted in supporting the weak against the strong. He cared more about people than ceremony and melted down golden ecclesiastical vessels in order to ransom Christians from Goths who’d raided the province. He was fearless before imperial power. When the Arian Empress Justina with imperial troops surrounded a church where Ambrose was worshipping with his followers that she wished to take over for the sake of Arian worship, he refused to budge; he and his followers simply sang hymns that he himself had composed until she finally gave in and left. When a few years later the Eastern emperor, Theodosius took over as sole Emperor of the entire empire, and in anger at the death of a commander of Thessalonica slaughtered some 7000 citizens of that city gathered in a circus there, Ambrose faced him down at the entrance to church and refused him entrance until he show public signs of repentance. Here we have it: a bishop standing up to power insisting that the Church, that Christ had spiritual authority over a secular ruler; that before Christ, a ruler was no more than a simple Christian and subject to the same need for repentance and faith as any other. It was a magnificent moment, and one that the church in the west never forgot. Here is why:

In the Eastern Roman Empire, at precisely the same time, one of the greatest preachers of all time, John of Constantinople, otherwise known as John the Golden Mouthed, or **John Chrysostom (347-407)**, was preaching about the evil of those who were sumptuously clothed, and how they were depriving the poor, the orphan, the widow and the laborer, building their palaces upon the lives and labors of these poor, and would one day be judged for it. John was immensely popular, and at Saint Sophia, the magnificent cathedral where John preached—the largest in Christendom which still exists to this day, though as a Museum--the crowds would glance furtively at the Empress. He reformed the Clergy. He faced down power in protecting lives. It wasn’t long before the Empress had John exiled. The earth shook from an earthquake, the streets were boiling with anger, and the emperor had him returned. He got under his skin and that of his wife again. Chrysostom was exiled again. From exile, he wrote; from around the world bishops wrote in his defense, but it wasn’t enough. He was sent into exile even further away, and this time, on the journey the soldiers, understanding that this would please the emperor and his wife, led him on a forced march which broke his health. As he lay dying, he prayed. His last words recorded words were: *“In all things, Glory to God. Amen.”*

However, the Emperor and his wife had triumphed over the church. A pattern had been established of imperial authority over the Church.

As a result in the East, in Byzantium, in what was to become the East Orthodox Church the *emperor* was, till the fall of Byzantium, to be the undisputed head of the Church; whereas in the Roman and Latin west, two powers were to be perpetually sparring for authority over the same flock: The king and the Church. And the king could be called on the carpet by the Church which could point to Scripture. There is another reason for this double power, of course, and that is that the political power that is the Roman Empire fell in the West, but the Bishop of Rome remained and continued. In time his authority was strengthened over churches in Gaul and elsewhere. This pattern was established at this very time, in the 5th century, especially during the episcopate of Leo the Great who was bishop between 440 and 461. During the tumultuous events of that time, barbarian invasions and so forth, he established his authority over his flock in various areas of the West, be it Italy, France, Spain, Britain, etc. The result of this was that in the west, an ecclesiastical power grew which rivaled the political power in any given country. For this reason, a single monarchical/political power could not hold all authority, both spiritual and secular, and a ruler's power could never be completely absolute. Strong opposing voices could be raised to call the monarch to account, voices which could cause him to tremble within his won kingdom. And a seed bed was prepared for democracy. This should be contrasted with the situation in the East, where the Roman Empire centered in Constantinople would continue for another thousand years, and where power was absolute. It is undoubtedly one of the reasons a different model for power has arisen in Russia than in the West.

John Chrysostom, the Golden Mouthed, died in the year 407 on his forced march to a hamlet on the shores of the Black Sea. Ambrose, bishop of Milan died in the year 397. It was an Easter Sunday.

III. AUGUSTINE

The last figure I'd like to visit before we come to the tumultuous events surrounding the fall of the Roman Empire itself and the end of an era in the Church, is of course Augustine of Hippo. With regard to his theological power he is among the greatest in history. No theologian was more frequently quoted in the Middle Ages. Here is his story.

Augustine was born in 354, in the little town of Tagaste in North Africa. At age 17 his parents sent him to study rhetoric in Carthage, that is, the study of how to write and speak elegantly. While there he gave himself with pleasure to other pursuits as well, and soon had a concubine and a son. While studying rhetoric he began reading the philosopher Cicero, and came to the conviction that he should do more than refine his ability to speak, but that he should follow the philosopher's advice, and also seek after truth. This led him

to **Manichaeism**, a new religion which came out of Persia in the 3rd century whose founder was called Mani. Incidentally, this religion was at one time very widespread, reaching Central Asia and China, as well as North Africa. It was a very powerful force in Persia, its country of birth. And at one time, there was a chance a part of the world like Central Asia, and who knows what after that, might have converted to it. It taught that in each of us there are two principles at work which have become mingled: light and darkness, and that our task consists of separating the two. It was a religion of competing gods, one good and one evil. Marriage was an evil, as it caused the commingling of the two elements within us. It was also the first great syncretistic religion, attempting to combine Judaism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and the teaching of Mani himself. It fascinated Augustine and many other young intellectuals, because it seemed so rational. It also ridiculed Christianity whose writings Mani saw as crude. Augustine spent nine years as a “hearer” of this religious philosophy, without ever completely adhering to it. And finally, when the best teacher the Manichees could produce was unable to answer his questions, Augustine, disenchanted, moved on. He also moved to Rome to be a teacher there; then, when a post came up vacant in Milan, went there.

Soon he had converted to Neo-Platonism which was essentially an attempt to reach ecstasy by working ones way up through various inferior concentric circles till one reached the Divine source of all reality. One did this through study, self discipline and contemplation. There is only one Good at the center of all. Evil consists of that which is further and further removed from that Good at the center. Evil is not a real “thing” but a position, as it were, of degree in distance from the Good.

Augustine seemed quite content with this popular philosophy. It tickled his intellectual fancy and undoubtedly his feelings of superiority as he felt himself closer than most to the Good. There was one problem with all this: His Mother. Her name was Monica. And she had been praying for him since he was very small that he find Christ. What’s more, she had come to live near him in Milan. Monica attended the Church of Bishop Ambrose. She convinced him that as a professor of rhetoric it was well worth his time to listen in to this famous preacher. So Augustine went. Not because of his interest in Christianity, which he felt was crude, simplistic, and full of violent stories, but because, as a professor of rhetoric, he wished to analyze Ambrose’s method of speaking.

Soon it became clear to him that Christianity was true, and he began a personal battle of accepting that truth or not. He knew that if he accepted Christ he would have to give up his prestigious position as a professor of rhetoric to devote himself fully to Christ, and not only that, but because monasticism and the ascetic call was so present around him, he felt that he would have to give up the pleasures of the flesh as well. As he wrote later in his Confessions, he prayed: “Lord, give me chastity and continence, but not too soon.” (Gonzales, 211). His efforts to conquer the flesh made him realize like Paul that he could never accomplish victory but for the grace of Christ, that Neo-Platonism was a dead end.

He struggled mightily within himself. At this point, the principle translator of the works of the **Neo-Platonists into Latin**, a famous philosopher named **Marius Victorinus**, converted to faith in Christ and made public profession of his faith. Then two high civil servants, having read Athanasius' Life of St. Anthony, abandoned their careers and honors in order to follow Anthony's example and retreat to the desert. It was too much for him. In a garden one day, struggling within him, asking God "How long? How long?" he heard a voice from beyond the wall of the garden of children at play saying "Take up and read! Take up and read!" And he returned to his study, took up where he'd been reading in Paul's Epistle to the Romans and read these words:

"Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires" (Romans 13.13).

That was it. He resigned as professor of rhetoric and gave himself to the service of Christ. His mother's prayers had been answered. And so began the career of perhaps the greatest theologian of the Church. He and his son received baptism from Ambrose (387). And they returned to North Africa (388). On the way his mother Monica died. Augustine was devastated. He retired to a life of study and monkish contemplation. At least that was his intention. However, God had other plans.

While visiting a friend in the town of Hippo, a friend he hoped to convince to join him in his monastic retreat, he attended church on Sunday morning and the bishop spotted him. The bishop began preaching about how God sent shepherds among his people to care for his flock and wondered aloud whether there might not be just such a shepherd among them that very day. He asked them to pray for guidance. And lo and behold, the congregation pointed to Augustine whose reputation was becoming well known. Augustine was joined to the bishop, a few years later became co-bishop (associate pastor?) in 395, and when the principle bishop died, there he was, solo bishop of the church of Hippo for the remainder of his days. That is where he preached and that is where he wrote.

He wrote well over a hundred titles. We won't perhaps, list them all today. He wrote exegetical commentaries on Romans, Genesis and the Psalms. He published books of sermons (more than 350 are extant). One of his books called On the Trinity, is considered one of his masterpieces and arguably one of the greatest theological works of all time. He also wrote a book called On Free Will, addressing *why* God *gives* humans free will that can be used for evil.

Some of the ideas which permeated the Middle Ages and were adopted by the Protestant Reformers, for which he is best known were:

- the idea that something called original sin affects us all from birth inherited from Adam;
- The idea that the initiative for our conversion comes from God's Grace
- The conviction that the Grace of Christ is necessary to true freedom of the will and the overcoming of sin;
- He wrote a treatise on the possibility and conditions of a war that could be considered just.
- He dismissed astrology, a popular science since ancient times, as complete nonsense, and condemned abortion, as had all the church fathers, as murder, if it occurred more than 40 days after conception.

He debated relentlessly with three antagonists:

1. with the **Manicheans**, of whom we've spoken earlier who believed that everything in life was predestined; that we have no free will
2. with, one might say a parallel denomination, called the **Donatists** in North Africa, who were probably largely ethnic Berbers, but who repudiated the Roman Church because they felt that communion and baptism administered by a bishop living in sin was not valid. Augustine argued it was: that God's grace and the faith of the believer was the key, not the life of the bishop dispensing these sacraments. And
3. with a British theologian named **Pelagius** on the score of free will and the necessity of Grace to help us live what God commands. Pelagius felt we could do just fine, even live sinless lives, without God's help, that we are not affected by sin at birth, but sin by our own free will and can live sinless lives if we try hard enough. Augustine argued that all humankind, including children, are held in the embrace of sin and need the Grace of Christ to be saved and freed.

But he is probably best known today for two works, his:

- Confessions (an autobiography of his spiritual itinerary and the discovery of God's grace) and a volume called:
- The City of God.

This second is a vast history. In it he claims that there are two cities, each built on love as a foundation. The city of God is built on Love of God. The City of Man is built on love of self. Gonzales: *"In human history, these two cities always appear mingled with each other. But in spite of this there is between the two of them an irreconcilable opposition, a war to death. In the end, only the city of God will remain. Meanwhile, human history is filled with kingdoms and nations, all built on love of self, which are no more than passing expressions of the earthly city. All these kingdoms and nations, no matter how powerful, will wither and pass away, until the end of history, when only the city of God will stand."* (pages 215-216).

Augustine's ideas are timeless, but there is another reason that this second work, the City of God, is important. It is because of its context. The book was, as it were, a harbinger

of an age to come, and a curtain on an age just passed. Events had occurred that were causing everyone, Christian and Pagan alike to ask the question of “Why?” In the year 410 Rome, the Eternal City, had fallen to the barbarians and was sacked by Alaric and the Goths. It was in response to this momentous, world changing event more than any other that Augustine wrote his most famous work the City of God to explain that the only Eternal City is the City whose foundations are laid by God himself. He died some 20 years after that first sacking of Rome in the year **330 A.D.** He and others must have found consolation in the truths delineated in that book; for even as he lay dying, his beloved city of Hippo in what is today Tunisia, was being besieged by the **Vandals, another Germanic tribe**. Shortly thereafter, they would sack it and burn it, leaving only Augustine’s cathedral and library standing. It was the beginning of what we call in the West, the Medieval Period. The Church of which Augustine had written was to survive the fall of an empire, and times of incredible depredations to become, if anything, stronger than ever.

IV. FALL OF ROME AND THE WEST

Fall of Rome. Let’s talk a bit about that Fall of Rome because it leads neatly into another figure who, like Augustine himself, was a hinge upon which not only the history of the Church, but the world itself was to swing. A few dates will have to do before we get to him:

406 A.D., on New Year’s Eve of the year 406, German barbarian tribes, the Vandals, Alans, and Suevi, poured over the frozen Rhine river, overwhelming the Roman forts and soldiers, and subsequently devastating the cities of northern Gaul. The Roman legions were withdrawn to Rome to protect it against the Visigoths who were moving south into Italy. Vast libraries were destroyed. Learning was all but wiped out in Gaul and northern Italy.

410: On August 24, Alaric and his Visigoths, another Germanic tribe sacked Rome. The last of the Roman legions left Britain and were withdrawn first to Gaul, and then to Rome itself. Gradually, the legions became themselves predominantly made up of German mercenaries, the Visigoths and Ostrogoths. These fought against the Huns, another barbarian tribe originating from the plains of Central Asia. The Huns were known as the scourge of the Empire, burning and devastating as they came, especially the Balkan peninsula and threatening Constantinople on several occasions.

451: In 451 Attila was finally defeated at Chalon-sur-Marne by allied Roman, Frank, Burgundian, and Visigothic forces. In 452, threatening the invade Italy south of the Po, a delegation headed by Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome convinced them to turn back. Attila died a year later.

455: Then, in 455, the same tribe that had sacked and burned Latin North Africa, the Vandals, crossed the Mediterranean and plundered Rome once again.

476: Twenty years after that, Another German, Odacer, conquered Rome, only to be conquered himself by Theodoric, a Visigoth who proclaimed himself king. The vast Roman West had ceased to be an empire and become instead a patchwork of kingdoms ruled over by various Germanic tribes. Most of these tribes were Arians having been converted through the work of Ulfilas, whom we mentioned last week. And though some of them, particularly those in Italy and Gaul were relatively lenient with Nicene Christians, the Vandals of North Africa persecuted the Church there unrelentingly, until finally, a hundred years later, the Byzantines re-conquered North Africa and held on there a hundred years until the coming of Islam.

In the midst of all that devastation and confusion one major force held its ground, at least in Rome itself. The Bishop of Rome had huge moral prestige. In those countries devastated by the Germans, the church did as well. When governors of towns were killed, the bishops stepped in to fill the gap organizing their parishes and providing relief for the poor. But their lands were now over-run by un-evangelized barbarians.

As time went on, the Church's task became, more than ever before, the re-evangelization of the western world. But God, as we shall see, was not dependent upon Rome alone. He never ceases to work, even in the midst of enormous devastation and catastrophe. In the waning years of the 5th century He brought a small Germanic kingdom into his fold through the efforts of a Christian wife. The year was 496. The King was **Clovis the Frank. The year was 496.** Clovis, who was the first Louis told his wife **Clothilde who was a devout Christian and gave unceasingly to the poor**, that he would convert if God gave him victory the next day in battle. God did, and so Clovis, along with 3000 of his warriors were baptized on Christmas day 496. This was an event which was to have profound consequences. Clovis shortly thereafter defeated the Burgundian tribes, and carved out a nice little kingdom for himself around what is now Paris and southern Germany. If the Franks had not converted, it is likely that, when the Muslims invaded in the 8th century the land would not have resisted the temptations of Islam. As it was, Charles Martel held back the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732, and another descendent, Charlemagne developed schools and scholars who held the Christian flame alight during the succeeding depredations of the Vikings.

But it is to a more simple man I'd like to turn now, a man through whose piety and learning a world was changed. Here is his story:

V. PATRICK OF IRELAND

In about the year 404, a British boy living in what is now Wales on the west coast of Britain was taken captive by Irish raiders and slavers. He was a young man of about sixteen who had grown up in the wealth and ease of a city where Roman and Celtic

customs had grown together into a flourishing British culture. As you'll recall, the theologian Pelagius, one of Augustine's protagonists was from Britain, and London itself at the time was a thriving city. But the boy was from the coastal area on the Irish Sea, and it was to that Celtic land of Ireland that pirates led him and sold him to work as a Shepherd in Slemish County Antrim, near what we now know as Belfast. The young man had been raised as a Christian, and in the six years that followed, suffering hunger, nakedness, isolation, and cold, with no hope of returning home, he turned to Christ in prayer. He wrote later of his experience:

"Tending flocks was my daily work and I would pray constantly during the daylight hours. The love of God and the fear of him surrounded me more and more—and faith grew and the Spirit was roused, so that in one day I would say as many as a hundred prayers and after dark nearly as many again, even while I remained in the woods or on the mountain. I would wake and pray before daybreak—through snow, frost, rain—nor was there any sluggishness in me...because then the Spirit within me was ardent."

After six years of this he had turned from a well-fed patrician's son, into a holy man, obsessed with Christ. On his last night as a slave, during his sleep, he was awakened by a mysterious voice that said to him: "Your hungers are rewarded: you are going home." He sat up, startled. The voice continued: "Look, your ship is ready."

The farm where he worked was inland, nowhere near the sea, but he set out, not knowing where he was going, and walked some two hundred miles through territory he had never crossed before until he reached a southeastern inlet where he saw a ship. During the whole trip, no one had followed him; or tried to stop him, something virtually unknown among fugitive slaves. He found sailors loading a cargo of Irish hounds for sale on the continent, asked to board, and after initially refusing him, they called him back and he was soon aboard ship. He was free. They crossed the channel and landed in Gaul, that is, France, where they began to cross the continent in order to sell the dogs, but for two weeks, to their utter amazement, they could find nothing but devastation. Unbeknownst to them they were witnessing the work of German barbarians and the end of Roman Gaul. The year was 407. They began to suffer hunger. So they turned on the boy whom they knew to be a Christian and the captain said to him: "How about it, Christian? You say that your god is great and all-powerful, so why can't you pray for us? We're starving to death, and there's little chance of our ever seeing a living soul."

The shepherd replied: "From the bottom of your heart turn trustingly to the Lord my God, for nothing is impossible to him. *And today*, he will send you food for your journey until you are filled, for he has an abundance everywhere." The young man's sincerity affected them all, they bowed their heads in prayer to give a try at faith in God, and with that the sound of a stampede of pigs racing down the road toward them attracted their attention. This was not just food, but the best food of all! (Cahill, pages 104-105, [How the Irish Saved Civilization.](#))

After a few years he returned home where his parents were beside themselves with joy at seeing him, and begged him never to leave home again. But one night he had a vision. It was of a man he had known in Ireland who was holding countless letters, one of which he handed to him that had as a heading: VOX HIBERIONACUM, the voice of the Irish, and suddenly he heard a multitude of voices crying out to him: "We beg you to come and walk among us once more." "Stabbed in the heart" he wrote he was unable to read further, and he woke up. He was unable to get the words out of his mind. The visions increased until a voice spoke within him saying, "He who gave his life for you, He it is who speaks within you."

Patrick had received his call. Shortly thereafter he left for an island monastery just off the coast of Southern France near Cannes, to receive a monk's education. He was ordained first a deacon, then a priest, then a bishop, and shortly thereafter left for Ireland, the first missionary bishop, that is, the first bishop without a church. The year was 432. He was 45 years old.

For the next thirty years he evangelized Ireland, going to the *pagus* (from which the word pagan comes meaning the countryside) establishing bishops throughout northern, central, and eastern Ireland. He kept his bishops close to local kings in order to keep an eye on the most powerful raiders and rustlers and to limit their depredations. He hated slavery, and labored against it his whole life. Within his lifetime or soon after his death, the Irish slave trade had come to an end. Other forms of violence were vastly decreased, including murder and inter-tribal warfare.

Here is a part of a prayer of St. Patrick:

"Christ to shield me today
 Against poison, against burning,
 Against drowning, against wounding,
 So that there may come to me abundance of reward.
 Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
 Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
 Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
 Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
 Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
 Christ in every eye that sees me,
 Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
 Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
 Through belief in the three-ness,

Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation” (Cahill, pages 118-119).

This extraordinary work of Patrick of Ireland was one which was completely acculturated, close to the peasantry, compassionate of the poor and unlettered. And yet the work that Patrick began saved a civilization. Why? Because Patrick loved books and he bequeathed this love to all who followed him; and as a direct result in the decades that followed monasteries would spring up by the dozen that would become a home for refugee monks from across the world bringing their books with them. There in Ireland, not only the works of the Church Fathers, but the writings of Homer, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and many other Greek and Roman classics were saved. They invented a new script in which to copy these books as well as the scriptures, the Irish half-uncial and the Irish minuscule, and illuminated their scriptures with illustrations that have rarely if ever been equaled. (See, images, the Book of Kells). From Ireland these monks, carrying books from their belts, like their ancestors had carried heads, set out for Scotland, England, and the Continent to re-evangelize a land over which darkness had fallen. But all of that brings us into centuries that are beyond the scope of our hour today.

VI. THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

There remains one last event of the 5th century which it would be wise to touch upon. That is the Council of Chalcedon, which occurred in the year 451 A.D., called the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Church. It should be underlined that, though the western Roman Empire was, invaded, sacked, burned and devastated, the Eastern Empire, with its capitol in Constantinople, though besieged and at times paying tribute to the Huns, was still strong enough that Barbarian hosts were unable to conquer it. Indeed, under Justinian a century later it would know a resurgence of strength that would allow it to dream of a revived Roman Empire stretching from North Africa and Italy to the borders of Persia. So, in the 5th century when the Church in the west was experiencing the heavy hand of barbarian invasion and Arian persecution and all the cards were being reshuffled, in the East, life in the Church carried on, on a somewhat natural trajectory. And Church Councils of bishops from across the Mediterranean could and did meet to work out a consensus on doctrinal and practical matters. One such Council which was to have an important impact on the unity of the Church was the Council of Chalcedon, which met in the year 451.

The issue was once again Christology: how to understand the nature and person of Jesus Christ. The Council of Nicea in 325, let us remember, had determined that Jesus was fully God, begotten and not made: that he existed from all time with the Father being of the same substance as the Father and not merely a *similar* substance. The Council of Constantinople had reaffirmed and enlarged on this theme in 381. **But what of Jesus’ human nature? To what extent was the divine nature of the Son, joined to the human nature of Jesus? How was one to understand that Union?** One possible

solution had been proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea who theorized that the Divine Word had simply replaced Jesus' human mind, so that, though he had a human, fleshly body, his mind was fully divine. This tempted many theologians, but at the **Council of Constantinople in 381** it was firmly rejected on the basis that this placed our very salvation at stake: that it was necessary for Jesus to take up our full human nature in order that every part of our human nature be redeemed. If he did not possess a human mind, then, he could not have *redeemed* the human mind nor identified with the struggles, limitations, and temptations of the mind that are ours.

The next chapter in the debate, the one situated in the 5th century, was precipitated by a phrase. An Antiochene bishop, that is, a bishop from Antioch, had been made the bishop of Constantinople in the year 428. Now Constantinople, being the seat of imperial power, was a prize to be sought after by the bishops of Antioch and Alexandria among other reasons because it increased their own theological influence. As is too often the case in ecclesiastical history, driven as it is by much that is purely human and by competing egos, by this time there was a rivalry between the two ancient bishoprics of Antioch and Alexandria. And the Bishopric of Constantinople, having been filled by an Antiochene, the Alexandrians were not happy. The Bishop of Alexandria, one Cyril by name, filled with antipathy for Antioch, was waiting for his competitor to mess up in the slightest way. And slip up he did.

The name of the new bishop of Constantinople was one Nestorius. Nestorius had a problem with a phrase that was being used of Mary, Jesus' mother. She was being called the "Mother of God". Nestorius said that he felt it would be better to refer to her as the "Bearer of God". Most of us would probably agree with him. But for the Alexandrians, this was a theological *causus bellum*. Nestorius, they said, was diminishing the divine nature of Jesus and making him human. In reality as Gonzales points out in the Story of Christianity: "*Antiochenes, were simply seeking to preserve the full humanity of Jesus by making a very clear distinction between his humanity and his divinity. They feared that if the two were too closely joined together, the divinity would overwhelm the humanity, and one would no longer be able to speak of a true man Jesus*" (page 254). Some of what Jesus said and did they said, should be attributed to his humanity, some to his divinity. But the two, the Antiochenes maintained, should always remain distinct.

As it was, both never questioned Jesus' full divinity. But the question of defining the unity of the human and divine became a battleground. How were we to understand it? That is where the debate became contentious. It would appear that Nestorius came up with a position essentially declaring that Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior, was within himself a union of **two persons and two natures**: a divine person and a divine nature united with a human person and a human nature. Mary was the mother of the human person and human nature, the Father the origin of the divine person and the divine nature.

His position was eventually condemned at **the 3rd Ecumenical Council, that of Ephesus in 431**, and he was deposed from his bishopric. He retreated to a life of contemplation and study at Petra in what is now Jordan. Incidentally, the position of Cyril was condemned as well, but he refused to leave his post. And so the debate raged on. In 451 a 4th Ecumenical Council was called, the Council of Chalcedon to attempt to seek a solution and create a definition which could be universally accepted. In it, they once again rejected Nestorius' position that there was a union of two persons and two natures, agreeing with Leo the Great of Rome and Tertullian before him, that there was in Jesus only a single person rather than two, though there **were two natures**. They **did not attempt to define** how that union operated, or to understand it. They simply accepted it as a reality. This is what they said:

“Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that it is to be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human, with a rational soul and a body, of one substance with the Father in his divinity, and of one substance with us in his humanity, in every way like us, with the only exception of sin, begotten of the Father before all time in his divinity, and also begotten in the latter days, in his humanity, of Mary the virgin bearer of God. This is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, manifested in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person and hypostasis. They are not divided into two person, but belong to the one Only-begotten Son, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this, as the prophets of old said of him, and as he himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has passed on to us.” (Gonzales, page 257).

Though Nestorius himself meekly bowed to the judgment of both of these councils and accepted them, his followers did not and eventually became known as Nestorians. They were already known as Syriac Christians, and it was among them that this doctrine was adopted. Their center was the capitol of Persia. Great scholars arose from this tradition, and for a thousand years the Nestorian Church centered in Persia was a center of evangelization of India, Central Asia, and China.

Others who were not satisfied with the pronouncements made by the Council of Chalcedon were the extremists of the Alexandrine position who maintained that Jesus did **not have two natures, but only one**: they became known as the Monophysites, meaning one nature. The Coptic Christians of Egypt today, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church are all monophysites, and for centuries, a branch of the monophysite faith was present in Persia as well.

If you're having trouble following the nuances of this debate, believe me, you are in good company. In the centuries that followed, even the principle theologians on either side of the debate were no longer able to sort things out. Much of this debate hung on the

nuances of Greek words, which words and meanings, over time, themselves evolved. And of course, there were, perhaps more importantly, questions of national and linguistic identity and pride involved. The position of the Council of Chalcedon, however, remains that of the Churches of the West, both Catholic and Protestant, and there is much to be said for it.

And it is here that our studies of the first 400 years of Christianity, must come to an end.