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Early Theologians



Church History - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the rise of monasticism and the emergence of the earliest Christian theologians in the second to fourth centuries. He explains that these theologians, such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria, merged Christian ideas with Greek philosophy and developed a method of Scripture interpretation that relied on allegory. Gregg highlights the key contributions and beliefs of these early theologians, including the concept of three layers of meaning in Scripture, the ransom theory of atonement, and the idea that individuals can choose to become Christian on their own.

Transcript

Last session in this series, we looked at the subject of the canon of Scripture, how the present collection of the books of the New Testament came to be officially recognized as belonging in the New Testament. And we won't go over that again. But this session, we will be talking about some of the early interpreters of the Scripture.

And there were, of course, in the early church time, two very important things to do with reference to the Scriptures. One was to decide what the Scriptures were, that is, which books of the many that were floating around that claimed to be worth something and claimed to be holy writings, which of those were really fitting to be included in the New Testament Scriptures. And the second was how to interpret those Scriptures, how to understand the meaning of them.

And we will be looking at, according to the handout I've given you, a number of the earliest and very influential interpreters. Some of them did a great service to the body of Christ in the comments that they made about the Scriptures and the books they wrote, but others we can see a tendency in them to advance along a road that we know from hindsight led to some of the Roman Catholic traditions, which most of us would not believe be spiritual or a good spiritual direction to go. Now, before we look at these men in particular, let me talk about a phenomenon that began to take place about the middle of the second century.

This is a backdrop for the study of some of these lives, because many of them were part

of a movement that arose called monasticism. Now, monasticism is obviously a word that's related to the word monastery, which is related to the idea of a monk, a monk living in a monastery. Monasticism was a movement away from mainstream worldliness in the church.

In the second and third centuries, primarily when there was a lot of persecution and a lot of martyrs being made in the early church, the heroes of the church were the martyrs, the bishops being dragged off to the lions or burned at the stake. They were the ones who inspired the faithful, the memories of these men. But after the persecution ended, and we haven't really discussed yet, we will probably next time discuss how the persecution ended in the time of Constantine, but when Constantine, the emperor, became a Christian and abolished the persecution of Christians, there ceased to be martyrs, at least of the same sort.

And the church needed new kinds of heroes. They needed new kinds of role models, new models of the spiritual giant. And the martyr was no longer among them.

And so what took the place was the monastic monk. And that was a movement that grew, especially, actually, before the persecution ended, the movement was beginning to grow. But it really flowered after the time of Constantine.

And the thing that led to it was that when the emperor became a Christian, it became politically correct to be a Christian. It became, there became a pressure on the average citizen to at least nominally or outwardly embrace adherence to Christian belief. And, of course, political advancement and social status were often enhanced by profession of Christian belief and being baptized into the church at that time.

Now, this led many people to enter the church who would never have entered the church during the times of persecution. During the times of persecution, the only people who would wish to be part of the church would be those who were willing to die for their faith and therefore, generally speaking, sincere believers. But when it became popular to become a Christian and profitable politically and socially to become a Christian, then Roman citizens began to convert, as it were, wholesale, not necessarily genuinely, but wholesale nonetheless.

Great numbers began to be baptized into the church. Sometimes whole armies were baptized at one time as they'd march by a river and a priest would simply throw water on them as they walked by in formation. There's this mass entrance into the church.

Well, of course, not too surprisingly, a lot of the people came into the church, didn't have any love for God at all, didn't have any true conversion whatsoever, and were simply baptized pagans. And the church then began to be filled with members who were very different in character from those who had populated the church meetings during the times of persecution. And this led there to be a reaction.

It led to a reaction among some of the more sincere and devout believers. No longer did the church have to flee from the persecution of the world. It wasn't the world they had to flee from.

It was worldliness in the church that many wanted to flee from. And the church became almost entirely corrupted within a few centuries. And during that time, there were men of spiritual perception and men of tender conscience who despised this trend and wanted to separate themselves from it altogether.

And these people became the monastics. And I'll just give you a brief survey of this. We'll have more to say about it at a later time, because once we talk about Constantine and the changes that happened in the church after his conversion, we'll have occasion to talk again about monasticism somewhat and bring up some other points.

But in order to understand where some of these men, these early theologians were coming from, we need to understand monasticism. The movement is believed to have been first officially begun with a single individual. His name was St. Anthony, who lived in Egypt.

And he was from a wealthy family. And when he was 20 years old, upon reading Jesus' instructions to the rich young ruler that he should forsake everything he had and sell what he had and give to the poor and go and follow Jesus. This man interpreted those words to mean that he should sell his entire fortune, give to the poor and go out and live aloof from the world.

Now, this is before Constantine by 150 years, 175 years. This is back about 150 A.D. He's the very earliest person that is usually considered to be the father of monasticism. The reason we know about him is because a later monastic church father named Athanasius wrote the life of St. Anthony.

And there are many anecdotes about Anthony that came about later, probably legends. It's hard to know how many of them have basis in truth. There is one story about Anthony that he was out in the desert and Satan brought all the wild beasts of the desert to come against him.

And they were surrounding him, drooling and snarling and ready to attack him. And he stood and faced them and lived in a cave. He came out to the mouth of this cave and he stood and faced the animals and said, if the Lord God has sent you against me, then come on and tear me to pieces.

I'm ready to go. But if Satan has sent you against me, then I command you in the name of Jesus, the conqueror, to be gone. And according to the legend, the animals left and left him alone.

And so these kinds of legends began to grow up around the monastics because they

didn't have martyrs anymore. They had to have superhuman testimonies of another sort. Now, of course, when Anthony came along, there still were martyrs for a good 150 years after his time.

But it was in later telling of his story by men like Athanasius in the fourth century that probably some of these legends developed. It's hard to know. But the man lived in a cave.

And lived under very harsh conditions, renounced all comforts, he thought it was more spiritual to be a hermit. We would call this a hermit. Actually, the first monastics were hermits.

The word hermit comes from the Greek word for desert, because these were men who lived in the desert. And St. Anthony was the first, but many followed. He became a hero and many others wanted to become heroes like that, I guess, or maybe they had better motives than that.

But they went out and lived in the desert individually in caves. They didn't gather together in colonies yet. And so the hermits were individuals who lived alone in the wilderness, usually in a cave.

But they were highly respected. And some of them didn't like the kind of positive attention they got. I think some of them became tourist attractions.

There's a story told about a hermit who lived in a cave named Simeon Stylites. I think is, I'm not sure if that's how you pronounce it. But Simeon lived in a cave and crowds of people used to come to the mouth of his cave to look in and see him.

Because he was kind of, you know, an oddity and kind of a legend. And so, you know, it was kind of a tourist attraction. And he got so perturbed about this that he set up a pole.

I forget how tall it was, 30 feet tall or something like that. And he climbed up on the top and put a platform up there. And he lived up there for 30 years and never came down.

And his disciples would come, he'd lower down a bucket with a rope, they'd send food up and he'd send down what he had to send down. And he never came down for 30 years. Sometimes he'd stand up on his pole at the top and there'd be thousands of people below him looking up at him.

He preached the gospel to them and allegedly thousands of people got saved. Through his ministry. And so he's another legend.

But the fact that he did live up on a pole is not legendary. I mean, it is recorded in all church histories that this man, Simeon Stylites, lived up on a pole for 30 years. That was their idea of spirituality.

Obviously, the monastics did not have a high opinion of the power of the Holy Spirit to keep a person sanctified in the world. And they believed the only way to remain uncompromised was to escape from society, to escape from the world. It's interesting that this man had disciples who had to move around in the world to get him food and things like that and send it up to him with his rope.

But he was the more spiritual man. He didn't ever come down. He had a constant mountaintop experience.

And this was something that became a popular movement. Eventually, however, a lot of a lot of hermits didn't fare well, although the first of them, St. Anthony, seemed to live to be about 105 years old. The rugged conditions in the desert didn't really they were not conducive to long life and survival stuff.

I mean, in the Egyptian desert, there were wild beasts and snakes and things like that. Not much food either. And so these guys, they you know, there were a number of them, but monasticism did not flourish until it took another step in its evolution.

And that was toward monasteries, the formation of orders. There was there were several men in the Eastern Church, particularly Basil the Great, formed the first monastic order in the Eastern Church. Later on, Augustine did the same in North Africa and other men did it other places.

What they did is they gathered persons of a monastic spirit together into enclaves, into gathered places, sort of a fortress mentality, coming out of the world and hiding behind these walls. And they began to have a common life and they began to have a certain rule that they all submitted to. Eventually, there was a ruler of the monastery and everyone had to submit to him.

And it was actually an improvement over being a hermit, because the monks had books, they had libraries in their monasteries, which the hermits had very few of those available. The monks were able to work. They worked hard.

They raised their own food. They built their own shelters. And in some cases, they went out and served communities around about.

And so the idleness and the lethargy and so forth of the hermit life living out in the cave was certainly improved upon by moving into a monastery where people could work together. They could share the responsibilities of cooking and all that kind of stuff. And they could still basically maintain the standards that they believed in.

And so this is what monasticism was. Most orders of monks, especially those that were begun by St. Benedict, one of the earliest orders of monks, was committed to three ideals. Their ideals were poverty, chastity and obedience.

Poverty, because they believed that riches and material things were evil and would corrupt them. You don't have to read very far into the New Testament to read verses that give that impression or could give that impression. They believed in chastity because there's nothing in the Bible that advocates chastity, although the apostle Paul did say it's a good thing for those who can do it to remain single.

But I think the move toward chastity probably had mostly to do with the fact that most people knew, especially men, the corrupting nature of sexual drive. And they wanted to free themselves from that. Now, unfortunately, as the monastic movement progressed, there was much corruption within it.

And there was apparently not a complete chastity. There are evidences that monks and and then nuns or whatever they were called in the early days sometimes would get together and things happen. But the monks who are really, you know, sincerely fighting off the sexual drives found ways to handle it.

Origen, for example, one of the most important Alexandrian fathers, castrated himself following, as he understood it, Jesus' statement in the 19th chapter of Matthew, verse 12, where Jesus said, Some make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. And that's how he dealt with sexual temptation. Jerome, who was a monk in Italy, one of the most important theologians in Italy of the period, he struggled very much with his sex drive.

Also, but he found that rigorous intellectual study was a good way to to distract him from sexual temptations. That's what he said. And he took up the study of foreign languages.

He studied Hebrew and and Greek and Latin. Latin and Greek were, of course, not really foreign languages in that part of the world. But he studied classical Greek and all and Hebrew.

And whenever he was bothered by sexual temptations, he just went more deeply into his studies in languages. And he became the best language scholar of the early church. And he gave us the first translation of the whole Bible into another language, which was the Vulgate, which he translated into Latin.

He gave other literary productions. We'll have more to say about him later. But poverty and chastity and obedience.

The thought was that personal free will was something to be sacrificed. It was a carnal thing to have desires of your own. And it's good to subject your desires to the desires of others.

And so the ruler of the monastic order would usually have to be obeyed explicitly as if he was a commanding general of troops. In some cases, this was not not not done badly. It was not not corrupted.

There were some orders where the leader of the monastery could not make any major decisions without a consensus of those in the monastery. But there were still individual decisions on a day by day basis that the leader of the order would make. And the average monk would just have to follow without questioning.

And some people, of course, criticized monasticism. Others think it had its good features. I would have to say both are probably correct.

There are things to criticize about it and there are things that are probably commendable about it. I'm not sure that we would have been more enlightened than they had we lived at that time. The Roman Catholic Church today looks at monasticism with mixed feelings.

Some believe it's the church needs two orders, the order of the average carnal believer and the order of the more fully committed person who can swear off of all material things and all marriage and and all self will and so forth. And and then, you know, they actually see two orders in salvation, the average and the and the extraordinary. In the Protestant Church, however, monasticism has largely been condemned.

They get a ceiling and we have Luther, of course, who is the father of the Reformation, generally speaking. He was a monk before he was a Christian. He was an Augustinian monk and it was while he was studying the scriptures that he decided to change his views about many things significantly enough to take him eventually away from the Catholic Church.

And he became a great opponent of monasticism and he thought it was a terrible thing because he said it suggests there are two roads of salvation. The road for the average person and the road for the super saint. And Luther did not believe that this was correct.

Well, without critiquing Luther at this point, we'll have more to say about him some weeks hence. This is your basic introduction to what monasticism was. Largely, the monastic life was an aesthetic life and aesthetic refers to the tendency to see the body as evil and something that needs to be punished.

So that people who are aesthetic often will sleep deliberately in uncomfortable places and live in uncomfortable places and eat only the barest of unsavory foods and fast frequently and so forth because they want to deny their bodies of any gratification because they think it's unspiritual to gratify oneself. This was a leading form of spirituality that appeared, as I said, appeared in the mid-second century, but it flourished in the fourth century after Constantine. Now, with that as a backdrop, we can look at some of the specific men who most influenced the church's thinking in the first centuries after the apostles.

There were essentially three centers of learning. By the way, the monasteries were the

principal places where the monks became the principal scholars because they were separated for that. They were separated from the world from regular locations and they had libraries there at the monastery.

And some of the greatest theologians of the church were monks. In fact, in the fifth and sixth century, almost every church leader that arose came out of monastery. So you can see how influential monasticism was during a period of time there in the early days.

And of course, it still exists. You've got Dominican monks following St. Dominic and you've got Franciscan monks following St. Francis and you've got Benedictine monks. These are all, of course, Catholic orders.

There's Augustinian monks. And so monasticism still exists, but it is, of course, not at all mainstream in the modern church where it became so in the days that we're talking about. Now, of the three centers of learning in the church, there were differences among them in emphasis and an approach to the scriptures.

There were theologians in Alexandria where there was a school founded to train initially to train new converts and the children of older converts, the children of Christians and adults who were recently converted needed training in Christianity. This school is founded by a guy named Pantanus. And we don't know very much about him.

But he we don't know when he started the school in Alexandria, but he led the school until about 190 A.D. when he was replaced by Clement, who was usually called Clement of Alexandria to distinguish him from another Clement of an earlier time named Clement of Rome. Who we talked about in an earlier session. And this school of Alexandria produced a very large number of influential church leaders and writers.

Clement was an important one, but not anywhere near as important as his successor, Origen, who is considered to be one of the greatest theologians of the early period. Sometimes called the first great theologian. In the Alexandrian school, there were others besides these men, Clement and Origen and Pantanus.

There was Athanasius later on who wrote the life of St. Anthony and who was very influential at the Nicene Council, which we haven't studied yet. And there was another leader named Cyril or Cyril. These five men in Alexandria make up the principal thinkers that arose in the early days from that school.

And they had certain distinctives about them. And when we call them great theologians, you have to realize that we're making some concessions because some of their theology, most of us would think is pretty bad. Much of what they came up with gave rise to many of the superstitions and traditions of later Roman Catholicism.

But at the same time, they did more than anyone previous to themselves in synthesizing the scriptures, teaching on many subjects. And wrote exhaustive commentaries and so

forth, which are a resource. Many of them are still available today, their writings.

Now, Clement of Alexandria lived from 150 to 215 AD. And he was the leader of the Alexandrian school from the departure of Pantanus in 190 for 12 years or 13 years until 202 AD. It is thought that Clement was originally from Athens, not from Alexandria.

But he was associated with Pantanus. Perhaps he came as a student of Pantanus or an assistant teacher or whatever. About 10 years before he took over the school, about 180, Clement began to associate with Pantanus at the school in Alexandria.

He assumed the leadership of the school in 190. But he was himself forced to leave by persecution 12 or 13 years later in 202. This man's theology was not what we'd call mainstream Orthodox, but he lived early enough that much of what we call Orthodox was not really hammered out and codified yet.

There were Gnostic tendencies in Clement. And, of course, Gnosticism was recognized, generally speaking, as a heresy throughout the church. But that doesn't mean that a little bit of Gnosticism was not tolerated when mixed with large dosage of Christianity.

And so Clement was sort of a borderline Gnostic. He merged Christian ideas with Greek philosophy. And where he really appeared like a Gnostic, he believed that contemplation of the logos.

Logos is the Greek word for word. It's the word that is used in John's writings when Jesus is referred to as the word. That's the word logos.

But to the Greek mind and to the Gnostic, the word logos spoke of an essence of wisdom or of knowledge, sort of permeating the universe. Something to be contemplated in a little bit like the New Age concept today of the Christ, you know, the Christ consciousness or whatever. I'm not sure.

I don't know if anyone is sure to what degree Clement's ideas look like modern New Age ideas. But he believed that by contemplation of the logos, people would receive from Christ the divine Gnosis, which means knowledge, spiritual knowledge. And that would lead to righteousness and from deliverance from sin.

And so he wasn't altogether what we'd call orthodox. But at the same time, he was about one of the best that they had in that period of time. Most of the theological ideas that we consider to be universally held among Christians were determined at later councils that had not yet happened.

So that it was kind of every man for himself in the area of theology. And of course, you find different people with different temperaments and leanings and backgrounds mixing various things together with Christianity in those days. Clement contributed to the growth of Christian mysticism, and he is regarded to be one of the inventors of the

doctrine of purgatory, which, of course, was a full blown doctrine later on in later Roman Catholicism.

But one of the first to conceptualize the idea of purgatory, a place where people who die go to if they don't go to heaven, if they're not good enough to go to heaven, not bad enough to go to hell. They go to this purging place from which the word purgatory takes its name. And there they have a period of time during which they suffer for their sins, whatever has not been atoned for adequately by Christ in that theology.

And then after they've been purged, they then can go to heaven. And so, of course, we've all heard of that doctrine before if we're acquainted with Roman Catholics. But before Clement's time, people were not acquainted with that doctrine.

He seemed to believe in something like universalism. Apparently, he did not believe that everyone would go to heaven, but he believed that most people would. Having undergone purgatory, he probably thought the very worst of people would go to hell.

But that most people who died did not die evil enough or corrupt enough to really deserve to go to eternal hell. And so they would go through purgatory and eventually be saved. These are some of the distinctives of Clement's theology.

You will find as you study the ideas and if you read the writings of these Alexandrian theologians, that their approach to the scriptures was fairly speculative. And they took what is sometimes called the allegorical approach to scripture. In fact, on your notes there, I misspelled allegorical unless I change it on yours.

My notes are an earlier version. But an allegorical approach to scripture suggests that every passage has a literal meaning, but also a deeper meaning that only the spiritual can see. And this idea of the allegorical meaning existed before Origen, but Origen, the successor at the school of Alexandria to Clement, is the one who really developed the whole method of interpretation of scripture, of allegorizing things.

Origen lived from 184 to 254. And he led the Alexandrian school from the departure of Clement, who was driven out by persecution in 202. He led the school there until 232, at which time he himself suffered.

And let me tell you a little bit about his life. Origen is considered to be one of the greatest, perhaps the first great theologians, some people call him. As a boy, he endured a time of persecution, which actually cost him his father.

His father died a martyr. But being a martyr was such a heroic thing to be that many people wanted to rush off and become martyrs at that time. And Origen himself, as a boy, had to be physically restrained by his mother because he wanted to run off and be a martyr also and join his father and others who died for the faith.

He was dissuaded from doing this by his mother and his father. Having died, the family needed support. So Origen sold books and became a teacher.

And he became a teacher first of new converts. And later on, he assumed leadership of the school in Alexandria at age, I believe, at age 18. He was a brilliant man.

And although he was obviously too young to be what I think Paul would call an elder, he was not at that point in the role of an elder of a church. He was running a school. I don't know.

I wish I knew more about that school. I don't know to what degree it might have been an informal thing like what we have here or whether it was something that granted degrees like other schools today do. But I have a feeling they didn't have degrees yet in those days.

But as a youth, he was recognized as being a man of brilliant understanding of scriptural things and a very spiritual man. Now, many of his ideas we would consider to be somewhat heretical. And in retrospect, the church is sometimes spoken of Origen as a heretic.

But again, he lived before some of the doctrines that we now call Orthodox were really hammered out. For the most part, he was Orthodox. For the most part, he held to essential Christian doctrines.

But there were some things that he was a little different about. But. He offended the bishop of Alexandria, whose name was Demetrius, from what I've read, this bishop was rather pompous and arrogant and self-aggrandizing and ambitious and jealous.

And I think he was jealous because Origen was a more brilliant teacher than he. And another thing that really offended the bishop was that once Origen was traveling to Greece and he stopped in at Caesarea, which is on the eastern Mediterranean coast just above Israel. Actually, it's in Israel.

It was the capital, the Roman capital of Palestine during the days of Jesus. And when he stopped in Caesarea, I don't know how all the circumstances led to this, but he ended up being ordained there as. A priest, right? Let's see.

Yeah, I believe it was as a priest or possibly as a bishop. I'm afraid I don't have the facts on that, but his ordination in Caesarea was kind of over the head of his own bishop in Alexandria, where he resided. And Demetrius, the bishop there, was upset with him and forced him to depart from Alexandria permanently so that Origen had to give up the leadership of the school there and move to Caesarea, where he had been ordained and he labored there as a teacher.

Now, Origen followed the teachings of a Jewish rabbi, a Jewish teacher named Philo. Philo

had lived much earlier than Origen's time. Actually, I think Philo was either contemporary with or lived just before the time of Christ.

And he lived in Alexandria. And Philo had taken an allegorizing approach to the Old Testament. Allegorizing means that he didn't really see the scriptures as literal at all.

Philo thought everything had a hidden meaning, a hidden spiritual meaning, even the stories, and that they weren't really stories that were intended to be understood literally. But they were intended to be understood symbolically or allegorically. And Origen fully developed the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation following the roots of Philo's methods.

And he believed that God, in order to prevent the pearls of God's wisdom from being cast to the swine of basically unworthy hearers, that God had concealed his deeper truths under the veneer of a literal text. And he did believe that the literal text was valid also. He believed it should be taken literally as well.

But he believed that every scripture had three layers of meaning. The literal meaning, first of all. And then he believed there was the allegorical meaning underneath.

Then there was the applicable meaning to life. This is what he wrote. Origen wrote, quote, The scriptures were composed through the spirit of God and have both a meaning which is obvious and another which is hidden from most readers.

For the contents of scripture are the outward forms of certain mysteries and the reflection of divine things. The whole law is spiritual and the inspired meaning is not recognized by all. Only those gifted with the grace of the Holy Spirit in the word of wisdom and knowledge.

Now, of course, this kind of talk sounds like Origen is setting up a caste system in the church where there's the haves and the have nots. There's those who have the gift of understanding the scriptures and the average person simply doesn't have that gift. I don't know to what degree he was an elitist.

I don't know to what degree he believed that perhaps everyone as they grew and matured in the faith could come to the point where they had this spiritual insight. Or to what degree he thought God sovereignly just gave it to some and withheld it from others. In any case, he certainly believed he had the gift and so did most those who heard him.

He was extremely popular as a teacher and very influential. And, you know, we might just say, I don't know. I personally don't know what you think about his assessment that he just gave.

That there's the outward form in the scripture and then there's the, that's covering over

the spiritual meaning. Most of us would not feel comfortable, I hope, doing that with most of the scripture. At the same time, there are certain portions and aspects of scripture that we do tend to see that way.

That we do tend to see allegorically. Take, for example, the tabernacle. The tabernacle of Moses.

I mean, I don't know what you think about it, but I certainly know what most evangelicals say about it. The tabernacle was a building. And there's a description of how Moses was to build that building.

And he literally built the building according to those literal directives from God. It was a literal building. We take it literally.

But most of us believe that the tabernacle, being a type and a shadow of spiritual things, was constructed according to a pattern in order to depict those spiritual things. Many of which were never made clearly known until Christ came. But when people, when evangelical Christians today talk about the tabernacle, it's very common to hear them find some special spiritual meaning for almost every detail.

Whether it's the measurements or the metals or the cloth from which things are made or the colors of them or the construction and the layout of the building and all that and the furniture. It's one of the most common things in the world for Christians. To see a spiritual meaning behind the literal tabernacle.

Now, most of us would not say that that should be done with everything in scripture. But it could not be denied that there are some things in the Old Testament especially that are types and shadows of things in the New Testament. And some of them could not be seen by the Jews before the Holy Spirit was given.

But when the Holy Spirit was given, the apostles saw many of these things. And you can tell by the way that they quote the Old Testament and how they apply it. That they frequently saw a meaning, a deeper spiritual meaning, in something in the Old Testament that the Jew would not actually see literally.

And which in some cases perhaps is to be understood both ways, both literally and spiritually. This has to be determined on a case-by-case basis. The main thing that Origen did that we probably would not agree with is that he took every passage of scripture this way.

I mean, even the stories about people's activities, everything had a meaning. Everything had a deeper meaning besides the literal meaning. And that is taking the principle somewhat to an excess, it seems to me.

Origen wrote a lot of works. He wrote commentaries on most of the Bible, almost every

book of the Bible. And there he expounded three levels of text.

The literal, the moral application to the soul, and the allegorical meaning. So he went through verse by verse each of these books and he gave the three levels of meaning to each passage as he personally understood it. He also is known to have written the first systematic theology where you gather what the scripture says on individual topics like about God and about man and about sin and about angels and about demons and about atonement and so forth.

And you gather up the whole teaching of scripture under these headings and try to systematize it. That's been done of course hundreds of times, if not thousands of times by other writers since then. But Origen was the first to do that.

He wrote the earliest known systematic theology. It was called *On First Principles*. He also is highly respected among scholars for the textual work he did.

Now, when we talk about textual studies, we're talking about the effort to determine which of the many manuscripts of the New and the Old Testament are the closest to the originals. Because I think we're all aware that we do not have the original autographs from the pen of the original writers of any book of the Bible. But we have copies of copies of copies of copies.

And in some cases we have hundreds or even thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of copies of certain parts of the Bible, especially the New Testament. And these copies are not identical to each other. There are some little differences between them.

They're not significant enough to get worried about. But there are some differences. And the early textual critics, of which Origen was one, wanted to discover by comparing different manuscripts and different texts, which would be the closest to the original.

That's not always easy to do. But Origen wrote a classic textual work called the *Hexaplot*. And in that one he took Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament.

This only involved the Old Testament as I understand it. Five or six different versions, five or six different manuscripts that were available. And he put them side by side in parallel columns for comparison, verse by verse.

And that has become very helpful, was very helpful at the time. That's a massive effort. And he made comparisons between them.

That would be in the class of textual studies, studying the text of the Old Testament in this case, not the New. He also wrote on subjects related to discipleship and Christian living. He wrote a book called *Exhortation to Martyrdom*.

And he also wrote another one on prayer. And so he wrote about practical Christian subjects. He wrote on the text of the Bible.

He wrote a systematic theology. He wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible. And then he also wrote one apologetical work.

Apologetical works meaning defending the faith against heretics. There was an early heretic who lived earlier than Origen named Celsus. And this man had written one of the first known critiques against the Bible by a pagan.

And Origen wrote against Celsus a work that as far as we know is the only apologetic work he produced. Now, the works of Origen that have survived to this day are not complete. We only have fragments of what he produced in his lifetime.

But from these fragments some deductions can be made as to what he believed about certain things including some things that we would consider to be not really right on. For one thing, he believed in the pre-existence of the human soul before birth. You'll perhaps recognize that that doctrine or one like it is taught today by the Mormon church.

That before you were born, you existed as a spirit in heaven. And Origen apparently believed something like that. He also seemed to believe in universal salvation through purgatory.

He believed that everyone would get saved eventually after going through enough purgatory. He also had the controversial view that when Christ died for us, he paid a ransom price to Satan. Now, even today it's very hard to describe on biblical authority how the atonement worked.

We know that Jesus paid some kind of a price and that price covered in some manner the guilt of our sin. And sometimes we simplify it in the extreme and make it like I've got a traffic ticket and someone else comes up and pays them a traffic ticket for me. But that's no doubt grossly oversimplified because, of course, in an illustration like that, the person who pays another man's ticket does not ever actually become guilty of the other man's crime.

He just pays the penalty, but he doesn't assume actual guilt. And there are passages in the Bible that seem to indicate that Jesus bore our sins in his own body on the tree, 1 Peter 2 says, and it says in 2 Corinthians 5, 17, it says, or 21, it says that he who knew no sin became sin for us. And some mysterious thing happened there.

That transaction is never quite fully explained in Scripture, but has been explained a variety of ways by theologians. There are several different theories of the atonement. We are probably most familiar with that which was popularized by Ambrose, a writer that we'll talk about a little later, and what's called the satisfaction view that Jesus paid a price satisfying the demands of justice.

But the ransom view of the atonement in Origen's Day, I'm not sure what the average Christian thought because we don't have very many average Christians writing books that have survived at that period. But he seemed to hold the controversial view that the ransom that Jesus paid was paid to Satan. Most Orthodox Christians today would not approve of that.

And many would not approve of the idea that a ransom was paid to God either. Because if the ransom was paid to God, the question arises, well, why would God require ransom to be paid for the salvation of man? Was God reluctant to forgive? Did God not want man to be saved, and therefore he required that someone pay him off? And that Jesus had to come almost in spite of God's reluctance and had to pay a price to God to win our salvation? There are some who believe so. And there are others today even, like Origen, who believe that a ransom was paid to the devil.

Like the devil was the kidnapper and God had to pay a ransom to him to get people back. Now, I can understand how people might get that impression. Jesus definitely said he came to give his life a ransom for many.

And the word ransom in our current usage more often speaks to paying a kidnapper to get back the kid he stole. And, you know, if we have the imagery of a kidnapping and paying a ransom, then the most natural way for us to think of it is that the devil kidnapped the human race and God paid a ransom to him to get back. But the problem with that is that as well as the idea of ransom and atonement, the death of Jesus is frequently spoken of throughout Scripture as a victory and a conquest of the devil.

And when you pay a ransom to the kidnapper, who wins? The kidnapper wins. That's what he wanted. He kidnaps the kid.

If you pay the ransom, he wins. He gets exactly what he wanted. Nothing more, nothing less.

And the winner in that deal would be the devil. And yet the Bible frequently tells us that when Jesus died, he conquered Satan. He disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly in the cross.

Therefore, the idea that Jesus paid a ransom to the devil does not appear to have full biblical support, though that seems to have been Origen's idea. Now, we have to be fair with Origen because the works of his that have survived are fragmentary. And some of what we know of his writings have come down to us from people who were his disciples and stuff who listened to him.

And it's always a possibility that something a teacher may say off the cuff in a speculative kind of way, sort of as a tentative theory to his class, may be repeated by one of his students as if that's theologically true. I know that to be only too often the

case. And a teacher might say all kinds of things off the cuff.

He says, you know, I kind of wonder. You know, I wonder if souls existed before they were born. I wonder if Jesus paid a ransom to Satan.

I mean, if Origen said something like that in class and somebody went off and quoted him as if that was his teaching, that might be where he gets a reputation for believing such things, although he might have believed such things. We just don't know for sure. But he appeared to believe some of these things that we would not agree with today, the preexistence of human souls, universal salvation through purgatorial cleansing, and that Jesus paid a ransom to Satan.

These are probably the most controversial views that Origen held by today's theological standards. Origen, like many of these fathers, lived an ascetic life, even to the point of self-castration, because he wanted to remain sexually pure. He felt that, according to Matthew 19, 12, some make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake, and he decided to be one of those.

And he endured persecution. His father had died a martyr. He wanted to die a martyr, but he didn't get that privilege.

Under Decius, one of the more severe persecuting emperors in 250 A.D., Origen was arrested and tortured over a prolonged period of time, imprisoned and tortured mercilessly. He remained true to Christ through the entire time, and eventually he was released, I guess, since he'd written a book called Exhortation to Martyrdom. His persecutors knew that he would only be too happy to be martyred, and they didn't want to grant him that honor and that privilege, and so they just tortured him to within an inch of death and then let him recover in prison and then tortured him some more, and so they didn't give him the privilege of martyrdom, and he was eventually released, but he was in such poor physical condition after his tortures that he died three years later in Tyre after his release.

So he didn't die at the hands of his enemies, but he almost certainly died prematurely because of the mistreatment from his enemies and certainly deserves to be considered a martyr also. He died at the age of 69. So this is what we know of Origen.

Again, probably the most important thing about him was that he formulated and developed into almost a science the approach to Scripture of allegorical interpretation. Seen three levels of meaning, the literal, the moral application, and the spiritual allegorized meaning of every text, and he wrote commentaries explaining those things. Most modern evangelicals think that's a really, really bad way to approach the Scripture, and I have to admit that is a silly way to approach some passages of Scripture, but I would be cautious about condemning it outright.

As I say, I think passages like those on the tabernacle, most evangelicals would agree that there's a deeper meaning than just the literal structure of the building, and Origen simply believed that the whole text of Scripture was like the tabernacle. It was an outward structure that had a deeper meaning to it. He went probably too far, but I don't think he needs to be totally condemned by the modern church, even if his doctrines were a little strange.

He certainly was a faithful martyr, a faithful servant of Christ. The next Alexandrian theologian I'd like you to become acquainted with is Athanasius. He wrote theological writings.

He was the bishop of Alexandria after the Council of Nicaea. I think he was a presbyter, and in his day presbyters and bishops were different things. Athanasius lived from 293 to 373, so you can see that his lifespan overlapped the conversion of Constantine in 313.

So he was born and in his childhood experienced the worst of the persecutions through Diocletian's time, and then he lived to see the conversion of Constantine and lived most of his adult life after the conversion of Constantine in a very different kind of world than that which the church had known prior to Constantine's conversion. But Athanasius wrote a book called *Against the Gentiles*, which was an apologetic work against paganism, and he wrote a book on the Incarnation, so he liked to write theology and apologetics. The Nicæan Council, which we will have more to say about at a later time, is one of the more significant councils of the early church period, and Athanasius was one of the principal participants.

It was largely a council where the views of Athanasius were being contested by the views of another man named Arius, again, about whom we'll have more to say at another time, too. Arius basically held views about the Trinity and about Jesus that are identical to those of the Jehovah's Witnesses today. In other words, he didn't believe in the Trinity at all.

He believed the Holy Spirit was not a personal being but was a force. He believed that Jesus was a created being, not part of the Godhead, as theologians usually use the term, that Jesus was not equal to God, nor was he God. He was the first created being of God.

As a matter of fact, though we recognize these doctrines as belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses, there were whole countries in the days before and after the Nicæan Council that believed Arius's views. Arius was a very winsome teacher and persuaded many people, and there were popes and emperors who were Arian, and under their rule, everyone was required to be Arian. There's no pluralism in those societies.

You were either what your king was or else you found another place to have a king. You found another land to live in. And so Arianism was really a widespread belief in the early church before the Nicæan Council, but Athanasius, who was eventually, after this time,

Bishop of Alexandria, but was earlier than that a presbyter in the church there, he was insistent that Jesus is not a created being, he is God, and that God exists in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

And the Nicaean Council was called by Constantine, actually, because the church and empire were about to be divided over this controversy. Athanasius and Arius were both very influential, and the church was very much torn up by this controversy. And Athanasius was the champion of the Trinity doctrine at Nicaea.

And very much of what has come down to us as orthodoxy on the subject of the Trinity is owed to the labors and the efforts of Athanasius. That council, by the way, happened in 325, so that Athanasius was himself only about 32 years old when he participated there. At one point during the council's proceedings, Athanasius seemed to be alone in his beliefs.

The Arian arguments seemed to be persuading most of the bishops. And at one of the intermissions, one of Athanasius' friends said to him, Well, Athanasius, it looks like the whole world is against you. And Athanasius said, Then Athanasius is against the whole world.

And he continued to battle for the doctrine of the Trinity until he overcame all objections and convinced the council that Arius was wrong and that the Trinity was true. Now, that did not, however, settle the question forever. You might think it would.

These councils are supposed to be official. But there were a lot of people who, although Arius had been beaten in the debate at Nicaea, a lot of people still thought Arius was right. There were still kings and later popes who believed Arius' views.

They were Arians. And because of that, there were times when, in his later life, Athanasius was banished from his home and banished from the empire because of his standing against Arius. He was the great hero of the Nicene Council.

But at later times in his life, he experienced occasional banishment, depending on who was in power at the time and who was leading in what church. So that is Athanasius. And the last Alexandrian father I want to talk about is Cyril.

He takes us pretty late on into the early 5th century. He was from 376 to 444 A.D. He became the patriarch of Alexandria in 412. And he defended the Orthodox doctrine of Christ.

But the reason I mention him and his contribution is that there was a dispute in his day over the use of the word theotokos when referring to Mary. Theotokos literally means in the Greek, bearer of God or God-bearer. And many believed that Mary deserved the title the God-bearer because Jesus, since the Nicene Council had made it clear that he was God, she bore God in her womb.

And obviously you can see that the word theotokos has in it the roots of the later title more commonly used these days by Catholics of Mary as the Mother of God. And there were those who objected to this title. There was controversy over it, but Cyril was one of those who applied the title to Mary and defended it and tended to be one of the early advocates, as it were, or contributors to the practice of venerating Mary.

This came out of the Alexandrian school, and there were others in other schools who did as well. But this is what we know about the Alexandrian school. These five scholars, their contributions to the church long term were somewhat mixed, of course.

Some of them very good, some of them kind of good, and some of them not very good at all. Then we come to the Western theologians. The Western theologians, when they wrote, their emphasis in their theologies when they wrote it was to simply establish the authority of the institutional church and whatever traditions were passed down by the institutional church.

This obviously, this Western church had its headquarters in Rome, and the Roman Catholic Church was under development at this period of time. And it is one of the current Roman Catholic doctrines that the traditions of the church passed down have as much authority in determining doctrine as the scriptures do, so that the Roman Catholics believe it as a tenet of their faith that the scriptures are authoritative, but equally authoritative are the traditions of the church passed down. And that is basically the opinion that was held by the Western fathers, largely centered in Rome and also in North Africa.

The first great Western father, and considered to be one of the greatest, was Jerome, whom I mentioned earlier. He lived from 345 to 420, and he was born in Italy. When he was 19 years old, he was baptized as a Christian.

He studied languages and philosophy in Rome for a long time. He learned languages better than anyone else of his generation. He was the church's principal expert on foreign languages.

As I said earlier, one reason he studied languages so diligently is because he was a monk, and he said that in academic study he helped to distract himself from sexual temptation. And he may have had a lot of sexual temptation. He became one of the greatest language scholars in the early church.

In his travels in Gaul and Italy and the eastern part of the empire, he became a convert to monasticism, settling in Bethlehem. He lived in Bethlehem from 386 on. From there he wrote and preached and promoted asceticism and celibacy and monasticism in general.

Of course, asceticism and celibacy are sort of hallmarks of monasticism, generally speaking. When Jerome wrote and gave spoken rebuttals to persons advancing heresy,

his arguments were largely just restatements of the accepted dogma of the church. Whatever was the traditional teaching of the church, he simply restated it.

Jerome is not known to have contributed much original thought in theology, not like Origen or some of these others who really had their own distinctive things. And by the way, that could be considered to be a positive thing. I mean, if the church is right, then there's no virtue in being original and coming up with new ideas that are different.

But unfortunately, there were already some views held in the church that were not all that right, and because of that, it would have been nice if Jerome had been more of an original thinker, could have looked at the scriptures more objectively, and not just passed along and defended the doctrines of the established church. But that was pretty much what the Western theologians tended to do. He wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible.

And a little bit like the Alexandrian school, the Western theologians followed an allegorizing interpretation of scripture, at least when they couldn't figure out the literal meaning. There were passages that he took literally, but there was also a tendency to fall back on allegorization when he couldn't figure out the literal meaning. He believed that the original text of scripture was infallible and free from error, and therefore he engaged vigorously in textual studies, as Origen also did in Alexandria, seeking to determine what was the best text of the Bible, the one closest to the original.

His principal literary achievement was the Vulgate. It comes from the same root as the word vulgar. But we think of vulgar as something crass or rude.

We think of vulgarity as indecent speech or something. But vulgar, the old English word coming from the Latin, actually means common or ordinary. The vulgar people were the common people, as opposed to whatever the hierarchy or whatever, the aristocracy.

And the Vulgate was a Bible written in the language of the common people, which was Latin. He was the first to do this. Until this time, the Bible existed in Hebrew, the Old Testament, and in Greek, the New Testament.

But he took both the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament and translated it into Latin. And the Vulgate is still a respected translation, especially the Roman Catholics seem to respect it highly. He also did something interesting.

He updated Eusebius' work. I haven't mentioned Eusebius before, but Eusebius was also a bishop, I believe, in Alexandria. And he wrote a book called Ecclesiastical History, which is the source of our information about many things, up to his time, which was up to the time of about 325 AD.

But Jerome, living a little later than that, carried Eusebius' work further on, from 325 to 378, and therefore kind of expanded on Eusebius' work. And such are the contributions

of Jerome, a Western theologian from Rome, originally, but also went to Bethlehem. The next Western theologian to consider is Ambrose.

From the year 374 to 397, this man was the bishop of Milan. And he was so influential and so authoritative that his writings really represent the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of that time. In other words, while some of these others like Origen never had the full agreement of the church about some of his interpretations, Ambrose's work basically is a statement of what the official teaching of the Roman Church was at that time.

And because of that, of course, the Roman Catholic Church, popes and councils since this time, and theologians have appealed to Ambrose's writings because they say, well, listen, we've got to believe what the Roman Church always believed, and Ambrose is a good representative of that. So he is considered to be a very important and authoritative source among the Roman Catholics of church doctrine. Over half of the things he wrote were commentaries on the scripture.

Like the Alexandrian theologians and like Jerome before him, he tended to take an allegorical approach to scripture. So he also admitted a literal sense and he also made application of the Christian life. So he did largely what Origen did.

But at a later date, one of Ambrose's things that he was distinctive for and remembered for is that he championed the practice of congregational singing in the Western churches. In the Eastern churches, there were practices of the congregation chanting and singing in the church service. But the Western church didn't have that.

They had choirs and things like that, but they didn't have congregational singing. And Ambrose thought that was a nice thing to have. And so he wrote quite a few hymns and he introduced congregational singing in the Western church.

He's called the father of Latin hymnody for that reason. There's a story told. That once the Empress Justina was angry with Ambrose and sent troops out to arrest him.

And when they came to his church, they found him in his congregation singing and chanting the Psalms. And the soldiers were so impressed and so overwhelmed by the spiritual experience that they joined in the songs and they gave up. They didn't arrest him at all.

And when they reported back, Justina just gave up her attack on him. Ambrose's influence was, like many before him, to encourage monasticism. And he was one of the earliest in the Western church to be a devotee of Mary.

Much of the Mariology that later developed grew out of the roots of Ambrose's writings. Probably the greatest claim to fame, however, that Ambrose has is that he is the one who converted St. Augustine or Augustine. And he is who we will consider next.

St. Augustine is arguably the most influential theologian in history. Most scholars will say he is the most influential historian since Paul. I would just say he is the most influential historian.

Because modern Christians tend to believe Augustine more than they believe Paul. So Augustine has had more influence than Paul has on the thinking of many Christians. Augustine is actually much respected by both Romans and Catholics.

Because he taught the authority of the church strongly and that all people need to be subject to the Bishop of Rome, of course the Catholics like that, he also believed the need to submit to the traditions and the creeds of the Roman church. And in that respect he is the father of Latin theology, the father of Roman Catholicism. But Protestants like him too.

Because he had a very strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation. The views that we normally call Calvinism today are not really original with Calvin. Of course Calvinists would say, of course not, they go all the way back to Jesus and Paul.

But that cannot be demonstrated scripturally. One thing can be demonstrated is that they go back to St. Augustine. As a matter of fact, quotes from earlier fathers, earlier than Augustine, can be brought forward in large numbers to prove that the fathers before Augustine were not what we would call Calvinists in their beliefs.

But St. Augustine definitely was. And what he did was merge Greek philosophy with Christian theology and came up with many of the views that later on were popularized by John Calvin. But since Calvin was a Protestant reformer, and very arguably the largest number of Protestants today admire John Calvin and his theology, we could say that Augustine was extremely influential both in the Catholic and the Protestant movements.

By the way, Augustine also emphasized more than previous writers the need for a personal experience of grace in conversion. People before him were beginning to think that just being born a Christian, born in a Christian family, just being born in a Christian country made you a Christian. But Augustine emphasized the need to be personally converted.

One of the reasons for that was probably his own conversion. He was born in a family with a Christian mother and a pagan father. His mother's name was Monica, and she was a very devout Christian woman and prayed frequently for her son's conversion, though in his youth he was very profligate and immoral.

He later wrote, after his conversion, Confessions, usually called by a longer title, The Confessions of St. Augustine. He gives his testimony, basically, of what he did before he was saved and how he got saved. Basically, he studied philosophy and he was heavy into sin and into hedonism and into sex.

He lived with a common-law wife for about ten years, and his mother prayed for him to be saved, of course, continually. They lived initially in, where was he born? I think he was born in Alexandria, or he was born in North Africa. He might have been in Hippo, where he later was a bishop.

I forget actually where he was born, but he made a trip in his youth to Rome. His mother actually prayed that he wouldn't go, because she knew how corrupt Rome was. It would also take him out from under her careful watch and influence.

But she didn't know what God had in mind, because when he came to Rome, Augustine met St. Ambrose, who was a bishop there. And Ambrose was able to give him intelligent answers that satisfied his philosophical mind to his objections to Christianity, and he decided to convert and to be baptized. And he gave up his life of sin.

Eventually, he became a monk and a monastic. I might say a few more things about his writings and his teachings. In addition to teaching the authority of the Church, that is the emphasis on submission to the authority of the Church and the creeds and the sacraments, and also the more Protestant-sounding doctrines of the sovereignty of God and salvation and the need for personal experience of God's grace, he also accepted the apocryphal books, which are those books that are in the Old Testament of the Catholic Bible, but not generally accepted by Protestants today.

He established infant baptism as the normal practice in the Church. From his time on and through his influence, infant baptism became a universal practice in the Church, though he didn't invent the idea. I mean, there were others before.

I think it was Tertullian in the second century wrote objections to the practice of infant baptism, which proves that there were some in his day already teaching it and practicing it. But it was not universal until the time of Augustine. Actually, much of what Augustine did was original thought with him, but some of it was not.

There were things that were practiced in some places in the Church that, through his mighty influence in the Church, came to be universal practices. Another belief that he made universal in the Church was amillennialism. Prior to Augustine, there were premillennialists and there were amillennialists in the Church.

And some of the leading Church fathers were premillennialists, but some of them were not. But Origen was not. Eusebius was not.

And Augustine certainly was not. And Augustine, by advocating amillennialism and by having such a potent influence, as he did, over the theological thinking of Europe up into the 13th century especially, he made amillennialism the universal belief of the Church, along with some of the other influences he had. Obviously, I'm an amillennialist, and I don't object to him doing that.

I don't believe in infant baptism. I do object to him doing that. Our assessment of Augustine is that he's likely to be spotty.

We're going to like some of the things he did and not like some of the other things he did, because he was partially what we call Roman Catholic and partially Protestant, though neither of those terms were really used in a present sense in those days. Well, before he was converted, I should say this, he did spend nine years as a Manichean. A few weeks ago, we talked about some of the early heresies in the Church, and the Manichean heresy was one of them.

And he, before his conversion to Christianity, was a Manichean, a follower of a man named Mani, who had a Gnostic sort of a philosophical, religious mumbo-jumbo that he taught. And he was converted out of that and became a Christian through the influence of Ambrose. And then he moved from Rome back to North Africa, where he had originated.

And he started a monastic community there. In 388, he started a monastic community for study and contemplation at a city called Teglaste. I don't know if it's pronounced that way, or Tegast, or Tegaste.

He was persuaded to become a priest in the North African town of Hippo in 391. And five years later, in 396, he became the bishop of that city, Hippo. Much of the writing that he did and the theological development that took place in his thinking ripened in the environment of controversy with heresies.

In the early years, he wrote extensively against the Manicheans, the movement that he had come out of. He'd be sort of like a modern-day ex-Mormon who wrote books against Mormonism, modern-day ex-Jehovah's Witnesses writing books against Jehovah's Witnesses. He had been a Manichean, and he wrote many things against the Manicheans.

Interestingly enough, the Manicheans held to a very strict Greek idea of determinism, which resembles, in some ways, Calvinism, the idea that everything is determined by God and that he's really sovereign over all events, good, bad, and otherwise. And this was a Manichean teaching. And in his early years, he wrote against this teaching.

And in his earlier writings, Augustine didn't hold these what we now call Calvinistic views. But later in his life, he was no longer locking horns with Manicheans. There was a new heresy he had to deal with.

In 411, there were some Pelagian refugees that came to his town from Rome. Now, Pelagians were followers of Pelagius. Pelagius was a man, we'll talk about him more on another occasion, another heretic, a major leader, who believed that man's free will was the chief reality in religion, that man had to be completely free, and this required that

God not have any control or influence over man.

He believed that man, if he wished, could become a Christian on his own. He believed that all men have enough grace from God to make the decision to become Christians. He believed that man does not have a sinful nature at birth, but that man is corrupted by environment.

He also did not believe that God knows the future choices of moral beings. There are people today who hold these views. This view, generally speaking, today is called the moral government doctrine.

It was called Pelagianism in the 5th century because of Pelagius being the originator of it. Now, Augustine, when these Pelagians came from Rome as refugees to Hippo, got into controversy with them, and because their views of the sovereignty of God were so weak, he actually began to pendulum swing and take a much stronger stance on the sovereignty of God and that man can't do anything without God birthing it in him and so forth, and eventually these very strong Calvinistic views began to emerge in Augustine's writings as a reaction to this other heresy, Pelagianism. Now, I say other heresy.

If there are any Pelagians present, my apologies, I don't call you a heretic. As far as I'm concerned, as I've said many times before, the victors write the history, and the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine was settled in favor of Augustine by the church. The church decided Augustine was right and Pelagius was wrong.

If the church had decided Pelagius was right and Augustine was wrong, we would all be Pelagians and thinking those crazy Calvinists. They're heretics, you know. Actually, Calvinists look at a person who's not a Calvinist today always as a Pelagian or a semi-Pelagian.

At a later date after Calvin's life, there was a man named Arminius, after whom the Arminian views are held. Arminius was not a Pelagian, but he was not a Calvinist, and those who today follow the teachings of Arminians are almost always called semi-Pelagians by Calvinists. Calvinists, that's about the worst thing they can say.

But in Arminian, he's a semi-Pelagian because Pelagian means heretic. Well, Pelagian means heretic partly because the church decided somewhere back there that Augustine was to be followed. And if they're right that Augustine should be followed because he's Augustine, then we're going to have to follow infant baptism.

We're going to have to follow the Catholic doctrines of the veneration of the authorities of the church and the sacraments and so forth, most of which we as Protestants don't accept. So the fact that Augustine happened to win that particular debate doesn't mean the book is closed on the subject. But I would say this, that from what I know of what Arminius taught on these subjects, he was kind of, as far as I can tell, he basically just

affirmed what the scripture said on these things.

I mean, that gives me away. I'm an Arminian. But people sometimes think, you know, the two extremes in this theological debate are Calvinism and Arminianism.

That's not true. The two extremes are Calvinism and Pelagianism. And Arminianism is neither extreme in one direction or the other.

Arminianism doesn't say that God makes all the decisions and it doesn't say that God makes none of the decisions. Arminianism doesn't say that man has no free will and it doesn't say that man's free will is totally sovereign. There is, I believe, a granting of the proper place of free will and of sovereignty in Arminius' theology.

We'll have more to say about Arminius at a much later date than this, after we've studied Calvin, because Arminius came after Calvin did. But Arminianism, therefore, is not, I mean, it could rightly be called semi-Pelagian. Because if you take Calvinism as the norm, Arminianism is about halfway back, the other direction toward Pelagianism.

But that doesn't mean that Calvinism should be the norm. It's just as possible that Arminianism really represents what the Bible says and that Pelagianism and Calvinism both take one thing to the extreme in a way that is not balanced biblically. Anyway, everyone, of course, makes their own mind about that.

I'm sure some of you are Calvinists, some are Pelagians, some are Arminians. I'm not willing to label any of these views heretical, because I'm not willing to decide on the state of a person's soul based on a church council's decision. I think that people are saved or not saved based on their love for Jesus Christ and their commitment to following Him as their Lord.

And from what I know of Pelagius, although I don't agree with his doctrine, I don't personally have any reason to believe that he's burning in hell today. My opinion is he's probably a Christian. I believe he was a sincere believer.

He might not have been. I don't know. Only God knows.

But I certainly know people today who are Pelagian in their beliefs, and I have no doubt about their sincerity of love for Jesus Christ and for God. And it's just a difference of theological opinion. Frankly, I think there's got to be room for that in the church.

Not infinite room, not infinite flexibility. There are some perimeters, obviously, beyond which you go. You go there and you're no longer talking Christian.

But on some of these issues, the Calvinist, Arminian, Pelagian questions, there are biblical passages that seem to support each position. I don't think they're all right. I think it takes very careful study and so forth to figure out what is right.

But I'm not going to condemn everyone who reaches a different conclusion than I do, as sometimes some Calvinists do that on that subject. Okay, so we can see that Augustine influenced theology, especially in Europe in the Middle Ages, more than any other man. And basically the residual effects of his teaching still are very strongly affecting both Catholic and Protestant theology today.

And yet his theology wasn't always the same. His theology was now Catholic, now Protestant, now Arminian, later Calvinist. Of course, those terms were not the terms used in those days, but that's how we describe some of those viewpoints today.

Now let's go on to the third class of theologians. We've talked about the Alexandrian school, which basically was dominated by the allegorical approach to scripture, and the Western school, which also typically followed an allegorical approach, but whatever the traditional church said was whatever they said. I mean, the real determiner of how to interpret scripture for the Western school is whatever the bishops had said was good enough for them.

It's sort of the support of the Roman tradition. The Eastern theologians followed a third approach to understand scripture, which is usually called the grammatico-historical interpretation of scripture. Most evangelicals today believe that this is the correct way to understand scripture, following generally a literal approach to the Bible and not agreeing with the allegorical approach at all.

The evangelical movement is largely characterized, at least I should say the fundamentalist movement, not exactly the same thing as evangelical, but the fundamentalist movement is largely characterized by those who say that the literal approach to scripture, the so-called grammatico-historical interpretation, is the right way to go and the only right way to go with any passage of scripture. It's called the grammatico-historical interpretation because it takes into consideration the normal grammar and the historical setting in which the scripture is written. Instead of taking something written to the Ephesians and finding some esoteric mystical meaning in it, it's understood to be an actual statement that Paul made to certain real people who were living in Ephesus at that time and addressed to their needs at the time.

Most of the Eastern theologians followed this approach. What's interesting, though, is that in the East, you didn't have the Reformation take place. That's an interesting irony because modern Protestants are so in favor of the grammatico-historical approach of scripture, yet the one branch of the Church that followed it did not ever have a Reformation.

The Eastern Church is still the third branch of the Church. There are Roman Catholics, there are Protestants, and then there's the Eastern Orthodox. The Eastern Orthodox is much more like Catholic than it is like Protestant.

In fact, there's very little difference between the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox, except that the Catholics have the Pope and the Eastern Orthodox have not the Pope, but they have the Patriarch. Is that what they call their leader? These are the principal differences. The irony is that Protestants are so much advocates of grammatico-historical interpretation, but the Western Church and the Alexandrian school, which did experience, eventually, Reformation, those regions, they originally followed a more allegorical approach.

I am in favor of the grammatico-historical approach, but I believe that it can be a reaction against the allegorical approach that refuses to see spiritual meanings where they exist. And I believe that the Apostles did see spiritual meanings in much of the Old Testament text, and we need to be careful about not overreacting to it. The first great leader of the Eastern Church, actually the founder of Eastern monasticism, was named Basil the Great.

From 330 A.D. to 397, he was one of the greatest leaders and founders of the Eastern Orthodoxy. He was born to a wealthy family in Caesarea. He received a first-class education in some of the academic centers of the world at the time, Athens and Constantinople, as well as Caesarea.

He turned, however, from an intended career in rhetoric. He was going to be a rhetorician, a debater. And he gave up that, and he was baptized, became a Christian, and he lived an ascetic life on his family's estate in Pontus for a while.

He gave up all his wealth and lived like a monk on his family's estate. He was very dedicated to biblical study. He opposed heresies, and especially Arianism.

And he organized the Eastern monasticism. He's the first to draw up the rules of the monastic order in the Eastern Church, which are still followed today by Eastern monks. He's considered to be the father of that movement.

Along with another man that we'll talk about in a moment, who is Gregory of Nazianzus. These men together compiled an Anthony of Origen's works. So interestingly, even though they took a grammatical historical approach to Scripture, they apparently liked Origen, the father of allegorical approach.

Basil actually succeeded Eusebius as the bishop of Caesarea. I had said earlier that Eusebius, I thought, was the bishop of Alexandria. That was wrong.

He's the bishop of Caesarea in 370. Basil the Great rejected the authority of the Roman bishop as supreme judge over the universal church, though he did accept the authority of the Church of Rome in the area of doctrine. He did not believe that they should resist the doctrine of the Roman church, but did not accept the authority of the bishop of Rome to decide all matters for the church.

He set up a monastery and at his own expense in Caesarea, he founded a complex of hospitals and hostels that surrounded the monastery where he and the monks that were with him could go out and serve people who were sick and so forth. He was a great benefactor to the poor and to the hurting. A very godly man, a very godly monk.

Then there were two other guys who were close to him. These three are sometimes called the three Cappadocians, the three great Cappadocians. One was Gregory of Nyssa.

From 332 to 398, he was actually the brother of Basil the Great and obviously came from the same rich family. He became a champion of orthodoxy later at the Council of Constantinople in 381. He is also considered one of the founders of the Eastern Church.

Gregory of Nazianzus, the third of the great Cappadocians, from 329 to 390 became bishop of Constantinople in 381. He also was a strong opponent of Arianism. These men defended the Nicene Christianity, decided the Nicene Council against Arianism at a time when Arianism still was asserting itself influentially.

Two other important men, I need to give these very quickly. One was Theodore, the bishop of Mopsuestia in Asia Minor for 36 years. He is remembered as a brilliant biblical exegete.

He wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. In these, he followed the grammatical historical method of interpretation, not the allegorical. He opposed the allegorical method.

His method became the leading method of the school that was at Antioch, the Antiochian school. Theodore was the first theologian to place the Psalms in their historical context. They were always just spiritualized before that.

He looked for the historical context of the Psalms and interpreted them in the light of David's actual experiences. For his attacks on the allegorical interpretive methods, though, he was condemned by the originists of Alexandria. That didn't stop him, however, from continuing his work.

Finally, John Chrysostom, from 347 to 407. He's actually the most prominent leader of the Greek church of a later period. He is best known as a powerful preacher.

In fact, his name Chrysostom is a nickname that alludes to his eloquence. It actually means literally golden mouth. He is another representative of the grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture.

And he was in conflict with the allegorizing method of the Alexandrian school. He was very important also in the formation of Eastern theology. He was born in Antioch.

He had a Christian mother named Anthusa. His father died when he was a baby and his mother was only 20 years old. But she was very godly and raised her infant son.

He had a pagan teacher named Libanius who spoke of John's mother in these terms. He said, God, what women these Christians have. Because she was such a godly and impressive woman.

John was baptized at age 18. He became devoted to asceticism. For a while he went out and lived in a cave alone.

But he ruined his health doing that for two years. So he came back to town to Antioch where he was appointed to preach in the main church there.