

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 133 Early Church Fathers II

As I mentioned last month, throughout history the church has taken the best works of all the church fathers and used them to better teach and project the faith into the world around them. Much of what they wrote still guides us today. Over time the church continues to add the best of each past Christian generation to its vast written and musical data base to teach the faith in worship, word and sacrament in multiple cultures and languages.

As we enter a discussion on the **Post Nicene Fathers**, it would be helpful to have a little information on the relationship between the Eastern and Western parts of civilization and the church at the time. There were multiple kingdoms because the Roman empire was divided from 286 to 337 and again for the last time in 364. The western half of the Roman empire collapsed in 476, while the Eastern half, also known as the Byzantine empire, didn't fall until 1453. Primarily due to the geography of the kingdoms, the church fathers of the time are called East and West. The Christian church functioned as one Holy Catholic (universal Christian) Apostolic Church in those multiple kingdoms at first, but during the time of the seven Ecumenical councils, 325 to 787, there started to be small differences in how the faith was believed and taught and confessed in the regions. This became even more pronounced with the Post Nicene Fathers, discussed here in two groups, the East and the West.

East

John Chrysostom (374-407) made bishop of Constantinople in 398, **Gregory of Nazianzus** (330-390) **Gregory of Nyssa** (330-394) & his brother **Basil** (329-379). The two Gregory's were instrumental in clarifying Trinitarian doctrine and Basil (with a short 'a' sound not a long one like the herb) wrote one of the first sets of monastic rules in 370. **Cyril of Alexandria** (376-444) helped the church come to grips with a number of Christological controversies.

West

Ambrose (340-397) Bishop of Milan, wrote "Savior of the Nations Come" a favorite Advent hymn (LSB 332). Ambrose is also a great example of speaking the truth to power; he stood with his congregation, barricaded in the church at Milan, rather than hand it over to the emperor. He also excommunicated Emperor Theodosius (379-395) for a massacre of 7000 people in Thessalonica, readmitting him after he repented. **Jerome** (345-420) was the primary translator of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, known as the Vulgate (382-405) **Agustine** (354-430) Bishop of Hippo (Algeria) published "City of God" in 427. He is also gets credit for our current numbering system of the 10 commandments.

There are many other early church fathers who also provided the church with a wealth of valuable writings and insights into the Christian faith. Some other key dates during the 4th and 5th centuries are: 311 the Edict of Milan recognizes and tolerates Christianity; 330 Constantinople becomes the capital of the East; 367 in an Easter letter, Athanasius lists the 27 books of the New Testament Canon; 380 in the Edict of Thessalonica, Christianity becomes the state religion of the Roman Empire; 410 Alaric the Goth sacks Rome; and in 451 Attila the Hun attacks Italy. In the latter half of the 5th century the "Goths & Vandals" Germanic tribes of the north, have started expanding their territories to the south and that leads to the sack of Rome in 455 and the fall of the western empire in 476. The Vandals (the eastern Germanic tribes) began a persecution of Christians in 478.

Next month we will spend some time discussing those 7 Ecumenical councils from 325 to 787.

Till next month Pastor Portier