

Lecture #4

THE NATURE OF CHRIST

The early heresies grew up around the perennial problem of Good and Evil--how to understand it, and how to interpret Christian teaching to explain it. The fourth century heresies arose out of another seemingly unanswerable problem, a doctrinal one, the meaning of the Trinity and of the Nature of Christ.

The idea of what constituted heresy had now changed. Up to now the "orthodox church concentrated on the task of preserving the unity and continuity of Christian teaching. It attacked heresy because it could divide and weaken Christian continuity. Now a heresy was coming to mean "a direct denial of what is true.

From the earliest times, the ritual words from Matt. 28;19 were used at baptism " in the name of the Father, Son & Holy spirit". The practice of worshipping Jesus as kSon of God was becomeing the accepted form of devotion. This had to be explained to pagan enquirers or it would appear like a return to polytheism.

to the Jew, a Divine Christ had to be reconciled with the unity of God. This was all happening from the 2nd cent. onward and forms the background to the controveries of the 4th.

MONARCHISM came about because of the desire to stress the Unity of God and to prevent any development that might lead to abandoning monotheism.

It arose in the late 2nd century and was advocated primarily by Sabellius. It declared that God the Father was incarnated and carried out his earthly ministry under the name of

God the Son. Monarchism is frequently blended with MODALISM, the concept that there is only one god whose essence is expressed through three modes of existence---god the father, son and Holy spirit---not three distinct divine persons as in orthodox dogma.

The Monarchists fell into two camps, both trying to keep the idea of the unity of God. The first were ADOPTIONIS, who accepted the view that Christ was a man in whom the Spirit of God dwelt, and the PNEUMATIC school of thought that held that Christ on Earth was the temporary manifestation in human form of a divine redeemer.

The Modalists' belief that God the Father himself suffered and died on the cross earned them the nickname of 'patripassionists' which means, "Father Suffering."

The trend in the 3rd century of worshipping Christ as the redeemer of all humankind seemed like a dangerous anti-monotheistic tendency to the monarchists. PAUL OF SAMOSATA, patriarch of Antioch at the end of the 3rd century would not allow prayer to Jesus Christ in his church, nor hymns in Christ's honor. God alone should be worshipped, prayers were to be through Christ as the intermediary.

Paul of Samosata was condemned and exiled by the pope. In this conflict about the nature of Christ the word HOMOUSIOS (of like substance) was used and would assume great importance in the 4th century disputes.

Origen was attacked by those like Paul of Samosata who were stressing the humanity of Christ for emphasising his Divinity. Ironically, Origen's teaching was later to be attacked and

condemned by churchmen who said Origen made the son subordinate. Origen explained the three persons as being within the Godhead--the Father, the Unbegotten; The Son, the Wisdom and Power of God, directing the universe; and the Holy Spirit, brought into being by the Father through Christ.

Origen, in attacking the Gnostics teaching that Christ was a purely divine spirit, was not concerned, as were the Monarchists, in upholding the concept of monotheism, but in giving the true meaning of human salvation.

Central to Origen's teaching was the thesis that "the whole man would not have been saved unless Christ had taken upon himself the whole man". This argument was of vital importance in later debates. The essence of Christianity for Origen was that Christ "made him humanity divine as a first fruit of the hope that is ours."

Since Origen subordinated Christ to God the Father, this heresy (among others already mentioned) caused his writings to be condemned in the 5th century.

The relationship between Christ and God, and between Christ and man, formed the substance of the fourth and fifth century controversies and, out of these, the heresies of this period.

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ARIANISM

ARIUS (250 - 336 CE) like Origen, was from Alexandria where he was both a poet and an ascetic priest. In about 319 Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, was delivering a lecture to a group of clerics. He asserted that a Oneness was present in

the divine Trinity. Arius contested this view, arguing that if the Father had begotten the Son, he who had been begotten and a beginning, and therefore there must have been a time when the Son did not exist.

Though he was not expressing anything new, Bishop Alexander would not tolerate contradiction from a subordinate and sharply commanded him to withdraw his opinion. Arius would not do so and the great debate was launched.

Because the questions : What do you think about Christ?, What definition is given of the Son of Man? They were the central questions in all understanding of the Gospel. This was why all Christendom was set aflame.

Bishop Alexander quickly lost his temper and wanted to be done with the whole thing, removing Arius as a presbyter and excommunication. This poisoned the air and gave the conflict a disastrous turn. A campaign of slander was launched at Arius.

Athanasius, the great Bishop of Alexandria, took a leading part in the campaign of slander. Athanasius was an ambitious man and he had made up his mind that Arius was an agent of corruption and error, and never tried to understand the basis for his argument.

Since the nucleus of this dispute was the problem of Christ, the quarrel spread until not a city or village was not discussing with bitter intensity. It was so bad the pagans made fun of them in the theatres.

Emperor Constantine saw himself obliged to take part in the dispute for it dangerously threatened his political interest in

the unity of the church. Also, a pretext to intervene in the internal affairs of the Church was welcome, and he therefore called a council to arbitrate the quarrel.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA (June, 325) is usually celebrated as one of the glorious events in the history of the Christian church. They met in the halls of the imperial palace where the emperor came forward to meet the bishops with flattering courtesies. He himself presided as chairman of the proceedings.

For those partial to pomp and circumstance, this was a great public spectacle but regarded realistically, the council fades. Even in those days genuine Christianity was with Anthony in the desert, not with those who entered the emperors' palace in silks and brocades.

The Fathers at the council were concerned neither for mutual understanding nor the practice of Christian brotherhood. Their maneuvers were directed toward improving their own positions of power. The Arian bishops relied upon their skillful tactics, while the adherents of Athanasius hoped to win advantages by their boisterous conduct.

After much quarreling, the faction in the middle offered a compromise formula stating the Christ was "one in essence with the Father." Using the word "homoousios" Of course, this had the defect of having been originally a gnostic phrase, and one which had no precedence in the Bible. (not found in old or new test.)

However, that seemed all right to Constantine, who just wanted it to end. The Conservative party made sure a few

anathemas against the Arians were included and finally, with pressure from the Emperor, it was adopted.

THE CREED OF NICAEA (325): Here is the creed adopted

We believe in one God the Father All Sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, only begotten, THAT IS, OF THE SUBSTANCE (homousios) OF THE FATHER, God of God, Light of Light, TRUE GOD OF TRUE GOD, BEGOTTEN NOT MADE, OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER, through whom all things were made, THINGS IN HEAVEN AND THINGS ON THE EARTH; who for us men and for our salvation CAME DOWN and was made flesh, AND BECAME MAN, suffered and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those that "There was when he was not,"

and 'before he was begotten he was not,'

and that, 'he came into being from what-is-not,'

Or those who allege, that the son of God is

'Of another substance or essence'

or 'created'

or 'changeable's

or 'alterable,

These the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

Constantine, who treated religious questions solely from a political point of view, assured unanimity by banishing all the

bishops who would not sign the new profession of faith. thus, unity was achieved.

It was altogether unheard-of that a universal creed should be instituted solely on the authority of the emperor, who as a catechumen was not even admitted to the mystery of the Eucharist and was totally unempowered to rule on the highest mysteries of the faith.

Not a single bishop said a single word against this monstrous thing. The same church which had effectively defied the iron regime of Diocletian supinely yielded to the command of his successor, who struck at its vital nerve in a wholly different way from the outward violence of persecution.

Arius himself, did not take a large part in the council but the council held his view to be unadulterated error and decided to crown their work by issuing a formal condemnation of Arius, since he had refused to sign the profession of faith. He was pronounced and accursed heretic. People who owned his writings were ordered to give them up, Arius himself was banished to Illyria.

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The Emperor declared that the decisions of the council were laws of the empire and to side with Arius was henceforth a crime. It was hoped these measures would soon destroy the Arian heresy. But such hopes proved a fatal illusion. Violent repression as usual accomplished the opposite of its intention. In the case of Arius it served to spread rather than crush the heresy.

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The Council of Nicea failed to recognize the true situation in the Christian world. The victory rested on a weak foundation. Countermoves against the decision were led by EUSEBIUS OF NICOMEDIA who had signed the Nicene against his convictions. He now applied himself to reversing the policy, and, since he was the confessor to Constantine's sister, he succeeded in bringing about a reversal of policy.

Constantine was chiefly interested in peace within the church, and he therefore wanted to reconcile the offended Arians. The emperor's intervention resulted in 330 in the recall of Arius. Arius obeyed and was received graciously. But when Constantine wanted him re-instated, Athanasius refused. Athanasius said that someone condemned for heresy could not be taken back into the church.

The reconciliation sought by the emperor failed and the factional struggle continued and became intertwined with political disputes. Within ten years Arianism gained the upper hand, was proclaimed truth, and the opposing party condemned as advocates of error. In 335, it was Athanasius' turn to go into exile.

On the eve of his restoration, Arius fell ill and died (the story told by Athanasius is grotesque). What it says of Athanasius is not to his credit. Moreover, the lurid fiction did not have the desired effect. Arius' sudden death just before his restoration to office gave rise to the suspicion that he had been poisoned by someone in the orthodox party. Athanasius himself admits that his party rejoiced over Arius' death indicating to

what an ethical low these Christians had fallen in the doctrinal struggles.

As Athanasius saw it, Arius error was to make the Trinitarian distinctions outside the Deity--that is, he postulated one Supreme Being and the Son and the Holy Spirit as two lesser beings. Thus Athanasius, like Origen, understood the Trinity as differentiation within the Godhead, and accused Arius of portraying a Christ who was neither God nor man but a superhuman myth figure.

Athanasius held that the meaning of the Christian revelation depended on Christ being fully human AND fully divine, w/o being fully human, humans could not be saved. He had to be fully divine or there would be no escape from the determinism of nature. Athanasius most famous statement puts it well: "God became man in order that man might become God."

Arius became a heretic only because he earnestly concerned himself with Christ and His nature. As one writer (Kutter) put it

'the whole process of dogma formation in the church is in reality nothing but the attempt to comprehend the divine phenomenon of Jesus after the fact, that is, after human intellect had once again usurped the place of the Spirit of God. Naturally, all that comes out is a series of incomprehensible statements whose logical absurdity nevertheless embodies the perception that in speaking of Jesus we are speaking of God."

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AFTERWARD

The attraction of Arianism was its apparent simplicity, or the impression that it was more rational and easier to comprehend than the opposing system. The use of the word SON had always caused people, unconsciously, to envisage a demigod, sent down by the "Father" and subordinate to Him, so Arianism seemed to be the form of Christianity most naturally understandable.

In the 370's, Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus, known as the 'three great Cappadocians' were able to bring the disputing parties together. They reached a formula on which most could agree. "there was one substance in the Godhead--one ousia; there were three persons -hypostases--not three gods, but one, to be found equally and identically in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" Gradually these views gained acceptance.

By 379 Theodosius, a strict Nicean, was emperor. He sought closer links with the bishop of Rome, Pope Damasus. In 381 he summoned the second World Council, the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. The Nicene doctrine was there made the definition of Catholic orthodoxy, and the universal (catholic) church was declared to be Trinitarian. This "Orthodox trinitarian" Christianity was established as the ONLY official religion of the Empire.

Heretics and pagans were made subject to fines, all pagan temples were to be destroyed, and those who continued to offer pagan sacrifices were to be sentenced to death. Arius was posthumously condemned for denying the full divinity of the Word.

Arianism had become a heresy and in the Eastern part of the empire 'Nicene orthodoxy' was firmly established. However, in the west, Arianism as a form of Christianity distinct from Catholicism, survived for about four hundred years.

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By a strange turn of fate, the saintly Ulfilas, who went as a missionary to the barbarian Goths on the borders of the Black sea, had been consecrated bishop in 360, at the time when semi-arianism was the official Christianity of the Empire, and this was the religion he taught to the Gothic people.

When they invaded and settled in the north western parts of the empire, they brought their Arian Christianity with them, and the Visigoths and Ostrogoths took the heresy with them into Italy, Spain, North Africa and Gaul.

These were in constant conflict with the Church of the Empire but by the sixth century the Arian kingdoms had been absorbed into Catholicism, and by the eighth century Arianism as an organized heretical form of Christianity, had disappeared.

However, the conception of the Son as an intermediary distinct from the Father, never has. Many church goers today understand their religion in this way. Some of the protestant churches, formed after the Reformation were specifically based on the Arian, and therefore anti-Trinitarian, conception of Christ.

The Unitarian churches (the word was first used in 1600) were an example of anti-Trinitarianism. For them, Christ is a divinely inspired man, and not to be worshipped as God. Many of the churches coming out of the enlightenment, like the Christian

churches (disciples) have strong arian tendencies because of the logic involved.

There had been two points at issue--If Christ were admitted not to be fully Divine, there could be no doctrine of the Incarnation; If Christ were said not to be fully human, there would be no doctrine of Redemption.

The Athanasian or Nicene Creed of 381 became the creed on which the present Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Creeds are based. In order to make completely clear the Trinitarian doctrine of the church, there was added, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son- a later addition), who, with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake thru the prophets

Arius had denied both the divinity of Christ and divinity of the Holy Spirit. There were others who went further and affirmed that the Holy Spirit was a Minister on the same level as the angels. (This was the MACEDONIAN heresy). The Nicene Creed established, once and for all, that in 'orthodox' Catholicism the three persons of the trinity were coequal in majesty and were one God.

However, one still must ask: "Can these credal statements be the fruit of a Divine Plan, notwithstanding the intellectual and political conflicts and compromises out of which they seemed to grow?

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CHRIST'S RELATION TO HUMANITY

After the council of Constantinople in 381, the church's disputes still centered on the being of Christ. But now it was not the relation of the son to the Father, but the relation of Christ to man; that is, the relation of the human to the divine Christ.

It was the churches in the Eastern parts of the empire who attempted to deal with this problem, in the West, the energy was concentrated on its struggle with the Barbarians. During the 4th and 5th centuries, the two parts of the empire were growing further apart. Ecclesiastical institutions, popular devotions and even the form of the liturgy were beginning to differ.

The position Christianity occupied in daily life was also different. Westerners had less time, or inclination for abstract argument than the more urban and prosperous east. Thus Athanasius affirmation that the Christian revelation depended on Christ being fully human and fully divine had been generally accepted. But the question that was now the center of debate was HOW was this so?

APOLLINARIUS, Bishop of Laodicea in Syria, had the aim of safeguarding the Divinity and unity of Christ. He was a firm supporter of the Nicene doctrine but as a true Greek he forced himself to face the intellectual difficulties involved.

Using Paul the Apostles concept of humanity, that we are made up of a body, a soul, which we share with all living beings, and a spirit, which was the highest thing in humans and differentiated humans from the animals, Apollinarius said the

Christ, the Logos took the place of our spirit in the man Jesus. That being the case, his human nature was ruled by a Divine guide, which meant that he would be forever sinless.

He was immediately attacked. His opponents argued that Christ was not a complete man if that were the case. He ended up being deposed from the bishopric and condemned for his errors.

Apollinarianism, in fact, was never a serious threat to "orthodoxy". It is important because of the doctrines expounded in order to counteract it, which in turn gave rise to a much more significant heresy.

From the 3rd century on there had been three great episcopal sees in the empire--Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. Rome was growing in pre-eminence and gaining authority over the other sees, but there was no original thought coming from Rome.

Alexandria was an immensely powerful see, mainly because of its age-old reputation as a cosmopolitan center of learning and partly because of the great writers and leaders it produced. These were strongly influenced by Plato and they tended to concentrate on the Divinity of Christ.

Antioch, the third great see, had a reputation as more semitic in attitude (Matthew comes from Antioch). Churchmen there gave more emphasis to moral teaching than to metaphysical speculation. They read the Bible literally and suspected allegory.

The result of this was that, though all cities don't think alike, Alexandria and Antioch could be guaranteed to take opposite sides in the christological controversies. Alexandria

concentrated on Christ as God, while Antioch concentrated on Christ as human.

NESTORIAN HERESY --Diodorus, Bishop of Tarsus, attacked Apollinarius for downgrading the full humanity of Christ. He made the first distinction between the Son of God and the Son of Mary in Jesus. Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuesta, had a disciple of his, Nestorius, whose views were to cause so much division in the Church.

Theodore insisted on the existence of two completely separate natures in Christ. To retain Christ's full humanity he explained the Divinity within him as God's 'indwelling.' All people have the essence of God in them to give life, but only the worthy have the 'indwelling.'

The 'indwelling' in Christ was such that God, the Word, was the effective agent of all Jesus actions. The emphasis here--and this is what Nestorius elaborated--was on Christ being "man who became God" rather than "God who became Man." Therefore the Son of God did not become a man, but was joined to a created man, born of the Virgin.

Veneration for the Virgin Mary had been growing and was gradually being incorporated into public devotion. Her title - "Mother of God" had been used in Egypt since the third century. Nestorius' reaction against this title arose partly from his Christological doctrine, and partly from his fear that she would be treated by Christian worshippers as a goddess--a return to paganism.

In 428 Nestorius had been summoned by the Emperor Theodosius II from his monastery near Antioch to become patriarch of Constantinople. He was already a famous preacher and a zealous opponent of anything that seemed like heresy.

When one of his priests in a sermon on Mary, said she should be called "mother of Jesus" not "mother of God" he refused to repudiate his assistant. Cyril, Theogian/bishop of Alexandria admonished Nestorius. They both appealed to Pope Celestine in Rome.

Cyril's Christology was theocentric, and the divinity of Christ had prime place in all his teaching. He held that in Christ, there was an indissoluble union between God and man. The Logos, incarnate in Christ, had taken on the characteristics of Man. This meant that Christ had the qualities of humanity in general, rather than those of an individual man.

The pope sided with Cyril who wrote out 12 propositions which Nestorius was to accept on pain of anathema. Nestorius refused. After a council in Rome condemning Nestorius in 430, a Council was called in Ephesus in 431 by Theodosius. There was a riot against the "opponents of the Mother of God" and at one point both Cyril and Nestorius were imprisoned.

The Council was dismissed as it had failed to achieve reconciliation but Nestorius himself was condemned as a heretic, deposed and exiled. Nestorianism as a heresy within the Empire was conquered but the compromise left extremists on both sides unsatisfied, and disputes continued.

Many Nestorians fled to persecution and settled in Persia and Syria, where they founded churches. From there, in the next 2 centuries, they went as missionaries all over Asia, from Arabia to China.

It was carried to India where it was known as the Church of St Thomas after its legendary founding by the Apostle Thomas. The Persian church officially adopted Nestorian doctrines in 486, making a complete break with the west.

Tho Nestorianism as a school of thought ceased to exist in the 5th century, there are still Nestorian Churches in Iraq and Iran. The only indigenous Christian churches in Iran today are Nestorian; tho small in number, the Nestorian communities form complete villages and are closely united.

The importance of this heresy lies less in what might have been, had a different line been taken at the councils, than in the effect that the controversy had on the history of the church. It led to a further definition of dogma by the church that of indissoluble union between God and Man.

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MONOPHYSITES -- The Nestorian heresy was important for the divisions it created within the Church of the Eastern Empire--divisions which it caused and which ere exacerbated by the heresy that arose as a reaction to it.

This heresy, monophysitism--was to created a schism in the Church, to disrupt the Empire, and to give rise to separated Eastern churches that still exist today--the churches of the monophysits in Egypt and Abyssinia.

Out of the intellectual conflicts concerning both these heresies came the formula which became 'orthodox' Catholic doctrine on the nature of Christ. This formula was accepted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but before final agreement could be reached, the Monophysite heresy had also to be dealt with.

EUTYCHES, the superior of a monastery near Constantinople, put forward an extreme anti-Nestorian doctrine. He emphasized the Godhead in Christ to the point of denying his humanity.

He used the phrase "One incarnate nature of God the Word," in order to explain ;that, at the Incarnation, the two natures of God and man blended into one, so that they became one nature, fully divine. Jesus was homousion with the Father, but not with mankind.

This over-emphasis on Divinity aroused suspicion of heresy among leaders in Constantinople and Eutyches was condemned at a synod there in 448. Eutyches persuaded Emperor Theodosius II to call a council to rehear his case and in 449 the notorious "Robber Council" met at Ephesus. It sunk to new lows of appalling behaviour.

There were riots, threats, even of death by bishops against each other, They refused to hear an important letter known as the "tome of Leo", which was to become the orthodox statement. The various bishops began excommunicating each other.

COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON-- 451

the fourth ecumenical council was convened with six hundred bishops, mostly from the east and 2 papal legates. Finally, the

"Robber Council's' proceedings were annulled. Eutyches was declared a heretic; both monophysitism and Nestorianism were condemned as heresies. and the TOME OF LEO was approved and accepted as the basis for orthodox Christological belief.

Basically the TOME OF LEO stated that . . .there is to be confessed one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in Godhead and perfect in Manhood, truly God and truly man, of rational soul and body, of the same substance with the Father according to the Godhead, and of the same substance with us according to the manhood, like to us in all respects, w/o sin. .

This did not end the quarrels @ the nature of Christ until the 7th century and the Arab invasions. Between 484 and 519 there was a schism between Constantinople and Rome. Popes were imprisoned and anti-popes installed, supporters of rival bishops fought each other, and separate Monophysite churches were established in Egypt, Ethiopia and Syria, where they till exist.

By the seventh century, the quarrels between Nestorian and Monophysite Christians had spread all over Asia Minor and North Africa. Mohammed originally had sincere leanings towerds Christianity, was horrified at the disunity among Christians and felt that he was called to lead not only the pagan Arabs, but also these betrayers of their faith, back to the Religion of Unity. Certainly the quareling Christian churches were no bulwark against the oncoming pressure of Islam. It was too late, the disputants realized that they must end their struggles and attempt to defend themselves against the Islamic invaders but most people, tired of the quarrels, converted to Islam.

CONCLUSIONS ON THE NATURE OF CHRIST

If the Pope and councils had decided differently in regard to either Nestorian or Monophysite belief it could have led to Christ being regarded either as simply a man, tho one inspired to a superlative degree by the indwelling logos, or as divinity approaching the docetic heresy of only appearing to be human.

In regard to the Nestorian leanings, there is a tendency today towards this kind of thinking, even in many main-line churches, New age groups, and the Jesus seminar. These leanings have a lot in common with the Arian heresy. What they both have in common is seeing Jesus as a great inspired teacher but not divine.

The monophysite heresy, is not only found in Egypt, Ethiopia and the middle east, but also in many more conservative or fundamentalist churches, particularly in the USA, who hold up Christ's Divinity almost to the exclusion of his humanity. This is not conciously monophysite (they probably wouldn't know what that word means) but certainly has elements of this heresy.

This pretty much covers the major discussions of heresy around the nature of Christ. From here we will move to more mundane heresies, such as Prophetic sects and purist groups.

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THE TWO ALEXANDRIAN TEACHERS --CLEMENT & ORIGEN

You will probably note that more space is being given to Gnosticism in its various forms than to other heresies. This is because it was the most serious threat to the existence of a unified and catholic (universal) church.

Gnosticism keeps cropping up and, besides in the middle ages, it is in some New Age religious groups today, for example, certain groups formed for meditation, of for the acheivement of greater spiritual consciousness, both w/in and outside of the mainstream churches.

The central aim of the second century teachers of Gnosticism was to establish an understandable Christian philosophy. The fourth century controversialists were concerned with refutation of error in points of doctrine.

Those who belonged to and those who attacked the Gnostic schools were concerned to discover what Christianity WAS. The question is, however, How much has been lost in condemning the Gnostic schools and in turning away from theem?

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (150-215 CE)

Clement was presbyter and head of the Christian catechetical school in Alexandria and often quoted from the Gnostics. He considered Valentinus and his school to be Christians bent on finding the truth.

He was considered a truely saintly man and was acknowledged as a Saint of the Church (still is in the Eastern Orthodox) until the 18th century Pope, Benedict XIV, having read and believed a

hostile account of Clement's work by Photius, a 9th century ecclesiastical writer, excluded Clement's name from the catalogue of Saints. This was and is regretted by many.

Clement's ideal was the Christian Gnostic, he said: "the true gnostic is the Lord's brother and friend and son." he wrote in his STROMATEIS (which means "miscellaneous collection") He even went so far as to say, "The gnostic practises being God, and has already become God".

He taught that true experiential knowledge comes thru the continued practice of faith and love. He rejected the gnostic idea of the world as evil, but took whatever he felt was of value from their teaching. For Clement, Christianity was essentially a philosophy in its original sense of "love of wisdom".

He believed Truth is Truth wherever it is found, and that it is everywhere the world of God. The same word manifests itself in Christ, but the same pattern remains. For him Christ was essentially a teacher and revealer, who came to lead humans to wisdom, to become children of God.

Like the gnostics he believed there were grades of Christians. The PISTES who accepted Christ w/o knowing why and who worked only in obedience for a reward. This was most the Christians. There were the PNEUMATICS who had some knowledge in addition to this and knew what they were doing. However, unlike the gnostics, he believed everyone could learn and become a true gnostic.

He believed in a secret apostolic tradition, an esoteric as well as exoteric Christianity.

ORIGEN (185-254 CE)

It was Origen who expressed this more clearly. He was the successor to Clement, having learned from him, and a devout Christian.

What was important to Origen was his insistence that scripture existed on three different levels. The "Flesh of scripture" was the body of happenings in time and space, which was to edify the masses. The second level was the "moral" level, which helped people know how to act.

The more advanced, the 'pneumatics' could study the mysteries, the "soul of Scripture" -the level above mere history and morality.

Simple faith was enough for salvation and the church embodied the substance of Christian belief in its exoteric rules of faith. The center of Christianity for Origen was Christ, not as man, but as the Logos who was with the Father from all eternity.

For Origen, the world was not evil but was for training and purification of souls who had fallen away from God. The punishment of humankind consisted in their turning away from where alone true happiness could be found. Their redemption consisted in being shown the way to find it again.

In the end, ALL (including Satan) would be saved. He believed in the possibility of attaining perfection after death as the soul's growth would continue thru a slow and painful ascent of many lives. This contained the germ of the doctrine of purgatory, and became part of church teaching from here on.

Origen's teachings influenced many Christian teachers but some of his ideas were held to be heretical. He was attacked on isolated propositions, such as his concept of a spiritual rather than a physical resurrection. His belief in the pre-existence of souls, and his teaching that all would be saved (restored to God) in the end.

Above all he was accused of heresy on account of his exposition of the Logos and of the explanation which he gave of the Son's relationship to the Father. He was accused of making the Son subordinate and so detracting from His Divinity. And yet, in the religious controversies concerning this relationship, both sides drew most of their ideas from him.

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