

notes

next week: 399 - Greek neoplatonism
Thru 401 - Hasidism
next week
A of G Chap. 8

Lecture #7

The Christian Theological tradition

Christian writers took over those elements of the philosophy and ethics of late antiquity which were in line with Christian ideas and expressed the inward-turning and growing other-worldly orientation of the times.

most of its material came from Platonism and stoic ideas of a rational ethical natural law which it related to Hebraic ideas of morality.

This adaption of Greek ideas to serve Christian ends was a most significant one for the future.

the Platonic and Stoic heritage imparted two characteristics to the Christian tradition which would remain throughout its history.

first faith was conceived as not standing in contradiction to understanding, religion as not opposed to secular knowledge.

second yet despite this deep and deeply significant orientation to the harmony of faith and reason, a conflict between the claims and implications of the two became characteristic of the development of Christian thought forever after.

in the forth and fifth centuries the combination of Christian faith and Greek philosophy caused bitter controversy within the church.

The church had experienced God in three fundamental modes

--the transcendent God of the Hebrew scriptures, the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, and the Holy Spirit in the life of the church herself.

the early trinitarian formulas have been discussed. but such statements were found inadequate for the intellect and demanded further explanation.

by the 3rd cent. the west had a near unanimity of the answer but the East was divided.

The East was culturally more thoroughly Greek and more inclined to speculative theology than the west and much of the outstanding intellectual ability in the Church was found there.

here [the next cent. and a half saw the working thru and fighting over these issues. this process had 3 characteristics which remained with the Church all thru its history one way or another.

1. was the one we have seen, a mixture of faith and philosophical speculation which led to objectivized formulated, intellectual statements about faith.

2. when these theological conflicts reached their full force, the church was no longer a community of the withdrawn, in the world but not of it.

Decius who became emperor in 249 initiated the first really general persecution of the church and sought to bring about its extermination.

this brought about both apostasy and heroic martyrdoms.

this continued under the following emperors and reached its greatest proportions under Diocletian

persecution came to an end with the Edict of Toleration in 311 C.E.

Constantine in 312 made Christianity the state religion as a means for constructing a foundation for unity and stability within the empire.

in this way the church became involved in the political life of Europe which brought the third point

this third element was the amalgamation of religious points of view with the cultural interests of national and ethnic groups.

thus not just the content of religious thought but the cultural, psychological and political needs of various nationalities entered in.] p. 5

[Christology

many formulas were developed in these cent. which the church came to see as heretical.

some identified Christ and the Father saying "that the Father himself descended into the virgin, was himself born of her, himself suffered; in fact he himself was Jesus Christ,". this was attributed to the devil by Tertullian.

Sabellius held "that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same being in the sense that three names are attached to one substance"

The Docitists saw Jesus only as a man chosen and adopted by God

at the time of his baptism by John (the adoptionists).

This conflict came to a head when Arius, a learned and pious priest of Alexandria said: "the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning."

before the Son "was begotten or created or appointed or established, he did not exist."

He was opposed by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria and by 320 the conflict was widespread and bitter.

Constantine desiring the unity of the Church as a basis for the stability of the empire called a council at Nicea in 325, the first in church history, and presided over it even tho he was not yet baptized.

Some 300 bishops were present with only about a half dozen from the west, where opposition to Arius was strongest.

most present were not really aware of the issues and the two factions fought it out, one supporting Arius and the other with Bishop Alexander saying the son is co-eternal with and like essence with the Father, ie., uncreated.

a creed was adopted using the terms "begotten not made" and "of one substance with the Father" representing the view of Alexander and the West in general.

the influence of the emperor was the decisive factor in the decision of Nicea. the real conflict only began with the Council's end.]

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Athanasius the next bishop of Alexandria became the champion of

the Nicene formula. he was unmoved by political pressures and strong in his convictions and led the Nicene party to ultimate success.

He saw the problem as intimately related to the understanding of salvation which he understood in harmony with the Johannine as well as Pauline tradition: "He was made man that we might be made divine," "his task was to restore the corruptible to uncorruption."

the conflict raged for years each side making use of and being used by political manipulation. Athanasius was exiled 4 times as were many others involved.

finally, like the earlier nicene group, the victory was made possible by imperial influence.

moreover, the debate was broadened to include a discussion of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead.

Athanasius and his party saw the relationship as similar to that of the Son and the Father.

Basil and the two Gregorys became the leadership of the Eastern church upon Athanasius death. these men were greatly responsible for the victory of the Athanasian point of view.

in 380 an imperial edict was issued saying all should hold this viewpoint. this set up one religion in the empire and it was based on the Nicene statements.

here
[the Council of Constantinople was held in 381 which was a synod recognized as an Ecumenical Council and it adopted the nicene

formula which became the standard belief of the Church and was
ratified at this time 4

because this sums up what orthodox Christianity believes I will state the creed.

We believe in one God the Father All-Sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and cometh again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, that proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshipped together and glorified together, who spake through the prophets;

In one Holy Catholic and Apostolic church;

We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.

[In this creed the belief in the west of one God in three persons is established faith in the church.

at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 many in the east saw this as destroying the unity of Christ, and before long Palestine and Egypt were in revolt and there arose the Monophysite heresy. which said Christ was only one nature, human and divine. these churches are still found in Egypt (coptic) Ethiopia, and the Middle East.

the battle against the Greek ideas by non greeks in the area ruled by Byzantium, the capital of half the empire, as well as disagreement about theology led to exhaustion which resulted in a conversion to Islam of most of the area in question.

this definition of the true God at Chalcedon became the faith of the overwhelming majority of Christians, the Eastern Orthodox, the Western Catholics, and most Protestant groups to this day.

The west made one addition not accepted in the east. in the 6th cent. the word filioque was added to the Latin creed declaring that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father "and the Son."] p. 7 → to p. 8

Mary

The church very early accepted the idea of the virgin birth (Matt. 1:20 and 23; Luke 1:34)

the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) the title theotokos (Godbearer)) was given to Mary. this was translated into latin as "Mother of God".

The devotion to Mary was thus confirmed tho it was already widespread, and would increase with the years. In the Medieval Church it became a basic and central devotion as well as after the reformation.

Pope Pius IX promulgated the dogma of her immaculate conception, the belief that she was born without stain of original sin.

Pope Pius XII promulgated the dogma of her Assumption—that

is the belief that after her death her body was miraculously transported to heaven.

some catholic theologians have even conceived of Mary as a kind of mediator with Christ between God and man., a view never given dogmatic status, but very popular.

Protestantism rejected this emphasis upon Mary and the devotion to her as a non-scriptural accretion and as a kind of semi-ilolatrrous activity.

[devotion to martyrs and other esteemed Christians began in the forth century and spread rapidly. these were seen as intercessors to God for people. it was approved by the later Fathers, the theologians of later antiquity, and in the middle ages was a prominent feature of popular and official worship and devotion.

it found its way into the liturgy of the Mass, where Saint Augustine speaks of its presence in the 5th cent. and the Divine office of the monastic daily worship in which the lives of the saints were read.

it has remained part of Catholic practice, but was thoroughly repudiated by the Reformation.] 11

Augustine Bishop of Hippo, N. Africa. was one of the most important thinkers the church has produced.

the main theological controversy in the west concerned the relations between God and man and the relation of each to the problem of the existence of evil and the nature of salvation.

more in line with the wests humanistic emphasis the concern over the functioning of the church and the relationship between the Church and the secular world especially the state.

Augustine converted to Christianity in 387 C. E. at age 30 or so. He had been involved with the Manichaeans, which had an idea of good and evil fighting each other eternally. however, neo-platonism was the most significant in preparing for his conversion to Christianity and in providing him with the philosophical concepts in terms of which he would develop his Christian theology after his conversion.

he confronted three viewpoints either heretical or antagonistic to Christianity which he wrote against.

first Manichaeism he attacked saying that only God is

He saw evil naot as a positive force, as did the Manichaians, but as a privation of good, a lack in an essentially good creation. The source of moral evil he found in the human will.

classical philosophy had neglected the concept of the human will but Augustine subjected it to brilliant intellectual analysis.

the Donatist Heresy

the advocates of Donatism protested immorality in the Church saying that the sacraments administered by unworthy clergy were invalid..

Augustine defended the church's sacraments as objective holding that they are not the work of man but of God and that therefore they do not depend on the spiritual condition of the

minister. this view has been held ever since.

Augustine saw baptism, eucharist, and Holy Orders as the three sacraments tho the catholic church would eventually define 7.

a sacrament is an act which the church saw as an outward sign instituted by Christ and which endowed the communicant with God's grace--his gratuitous aid to the human spirit--operating.

Augustine emphasized the significance of the institutional church and believed it was the only place one could find the holy spirit's love personified. he said: "the church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven (city of God 10:9)

she contains good and bad individuals who will be seperated out at the day of judgement.

he felt the church should support the worship of God and should help in counteracting heresy, although he rejected the idea of the death penalty for heretics.

He was the great source of ideas on the function of church and state in the middle ages, and even today.

Grace and Free Will

it is in these areas his ideas are most significant.

men were redeemed by Christ, but the question arose as to what role the individual performed in his own salvation and what part was to be attributed to divine initiative and support.

Christ's death was the basis for salvation, but how?

he varied at times on what this meant but one thing he was

sure of based on his own experience was the initiative was God's and the transformation was made by God.

salvation is the work of grace and it is neither deserved nor earned by man; it is God's free gift.

Pelagius was a celtic, possibly Irish, monk who came to Rome during the time when Anastasius was pope (399-401).

he taught that a man was himself responsible for both initiating and achieving his own salvation.

the Pelagians insisted that people were not fundamentally damaged by Adam's sin only that people should do what they could to be good because they were able to.

Pelagius is said to have started his teaching in response to a sentence in Augustine's confessions, "give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou Wilt". Augustine soon replied and a bitter controversy followed on the issue.

in the course of this Augustine set forth definite ideas on original Sin and predestination.

Augustine's own experience was that God had chosen and changed him, it was not his own initiative nor effort that was responsible.

The issue became a central one for the church and the conflict ended with Pelagianism being condemned and its adherents exiled in 418.

Augustine's reassertion of the Pauline position established the doctrine of Original sin as the Church teaching.

Predestination

Augustine felt that God had indeed oreordained to salvation and glorification and had given the gift of perseverance to those chosen.

this is a mystery. God does not cause evil but he permits it for a greater good which we cannot understand on Earth.

God is loving, generous and just and the doctrine does not impugn these divine qualities.

moreover, man's will tho not responsible for his salvation but rather for his sin, is seen by him as free and the doctrine of predestination as he teaches it does not violate the existence of free will.

man has free will but since God is omniscient he already knows what is going to happen and who will be saved.

for Augustine then, the

Ultimate concern was a personal experience of God (this is salvation) "the soul is restless until it finds rest in thee"--personal experience emphasized.

H. R. God, simple absolute being distinguished from all other beings. not made out of parts-infinite. "God is basis and source of all that is."

Hum. Fred. Sin, breaking God's laws--pride is the essence of sin. Adam fell into total ruin, eternal death and we have all inherited it. must have grace.

solution is twofold.

faith in Christ's death is the basis for forgiveness of human

sin.

1. christ's sacrifice to God pays for sin
2. substitutionary punishment for human
3. ransom paid to God to redeem us from the devil.

whichever form it is wholly unearned and personally related.
thus the only solution was accept what God has done for us in
Christ (no works, but faith)

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

lived in Italy and was a Dominican priest.

his main work, now accepted as the norm in Catholic theolgy,
was the Summa Theologica

Thomas shifted the basis of Christian theology from a
neo-platonic base (Augustine) to an Aristotelian basis.

in regard to sin, he believed Adam's fall was what deprived
him of supernatural grace wounding him but not vitiating his
capacities.

man is capable of some of the virtues, but not the three
theological ones--faith, hope and love. these require grace.

his ultimate concern was to have knowledge of God which was
used to attain a vision of God. (vision thru knowledge.)

union with God in heaven possible but on earth only thru
worship.

for Aristotle revelation fulfills reason

for Augustine revelation removes reason. grace is the
opposite of nature.

Aquinas said: "by reasoning one can find out almost all of

what is true but with revelation one can know everything.

highest reality Aristotle's view of God, who was first cause, pure act, most real and perfect being--absolute substance. no addition to God allowed.

natural law is part of law of God. one can figure out things about God thru looking at nature.

in nature there is natural law--(the mind of God applied to the world.)

Human predicament is original sin--grace is needed to regain faith hope and love that was lost in the fall.

the four natural virtues are prudence, justice, self control and fortitude (courage).

the human being can do these things. man is basically evil, but not as evil as Augustine's humans.

solution is only thru free and unearned grace of God one can get a vision of God.

sins are forgiven thru death of God

satisfaction of human sins thru Christ's death.

once redeemed one can gain merit by doing good things.

(Augustine wasn't sure one could do good things.)

Grace is received by human being thru distinct ways: the sacraments. (Augustine doesn't believe this)

mass was seen as a re-crucifixion of Christ with the doctrine of transubstantiation being solidified at this time. this is the

doctrine that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Christ.

Vatican I made thomas Aquinas views the one to follow and that is still true today.

Purgatory

various fathers taught that in some form a state after death exists in which those who have not made adequate satisfaction for there sins and are still guilty of smaller sins do penance.

Clement of Alexandria in the east and Ambrose in the west as well as Augustine all discussed the idea of an intermediate place where those who do not go to hell are purified before they can know union with God.

The eastern church also held a similar doctrine and continues to hold it.

In the west there is the idea that the souls in purgatory can be helped by the prayers and sacrifices of the living.

this doctrine became a basic one in the middle ages and all sorts of abuses arose, including the sale of indulgences which set souls free from suffering in purgatory.

the whole doctrine was repudiated by the Reformers in the 16th cent. but was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

If Rome has followed Aristotle with Thomas Aquinas, most of the Protestants have followed Augustine through Martin Luther, who was an Augustinian monk before the reformation.

Luther was deeply pessimistic so his view of man is to be seen

in his denial of freedom of the will and in his affirmation of the total depravity of fallen human nature.

man is hopelessly sinful and is saved because God deigns to regard him as righteous because of the saving merits of Christ's death.

salvation is based on faith alone--on man's total reliance upon God's mercy.

Augustinianism found its most radical and most intellectualized expression in John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536-1539)

for Calvin the fall meant man no longer has free will but follows of necessity either the attractions of his own fallen nature--his worldly desires and appetites of the flesh--or the call of divine grace. All human acts are sinful and all human glory is filth..

"whatever is in man, from intellect to will, from the soul to the flesh, is all defiled."

Luther had made salvation by faith alone the cornerstone of his theology and emphasized the all-prevailing divine grace which clothed the sinner with righteousness.

Calvin, a man of stern temperment insisted on pushing the notion of predestination to its logical implications w/o the saving qualifications which had long hedged its meaning.

Calvin denied the universal saving will of God and taught that Christ's atoning death affected only the elect.

he even accused Augustine of 'superstitious fear' in acknowledging the truth of this fact.

The Presbyterians followed this teaching of calvin in their Westminster confession of faith but have mitigated it today.

The Baptists in London (1646) followed suit.

however the Quakers in an apology of 1678 emphasized God's "infinite love" and declared, "Therefore Christ hath tasted death for every man. . even unto those who are necessarily excluded from the benefits of this knowledge by some inevitable accident."

The Methodists were greatly affected by this trend thru the Arminian church and rejected Calvin.

Thus, one can see that much of the split in the western church today is theological. While the Roman Catholic follow Aristotle thru Aquinas interpretation, most of the protestant churches follow Neo-platonism via Augustine one way or another.

in fact Augustine is greatly respected by many more fundamentalist churches while Aquinas and aristotolian philosophy is totally rejected.

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