Christian History
Issue 44: John Chrysostom: Legendary Early Church Preacher

Golden Tongue & Iron Will

John Chrysostom had little patience with sins of any sort, but he was especially piqued at the misuse of wealth:

> "It is foolishness and a public madness," he once preached, "to fill the cupboards with clothing and allow men who are created in God's image and our likeness to stand naked and trembling with the cold so that they can hardly hold themselves upright.... You are large and fat, you hold drinking parties until late at night, and sleep in a warm, soft bed. And do you not think of how you must give an account of your misuse of the gifts of God?"

This type of preaching—eloquent and uncompromising—would eventually earn John of Antioch the name by which he is now distinguished: ***Chrysostomos***, "the golden mouth." It would also contribute, though, to his exile and premature death.

Pleading Mother

Anthusa, a pious Christian woman, gave birth to her only son near the middle of the fourth century in Antioch, the city where the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians." Her husband, Secundus, a senior government official, died when she was about 20, leaving her with John and a daughter, both quite young. Shunning remarriage, Anthusa devoted the rest of her life to her children.

John was given the best education available in Antioch, a leading intellectual center of the day. He studied under Libanius, the famous pagan rhetorician. Rhetoric—the practice of public address used in the courts and politics—was the leading science of the era; teachers of rhetoric were the pride of every major city. Libanius had traveled the world, having been a professor in Athens and Constantinople; he believed in the pagan cults and disdained Christianity.

John apparently was planning a career in law. But sometime in the years of his formal education, he determined to give himself to the service of God, first by going into monastic seclusion. Like many in his day, he longed for a time apart from the world to grow closer to God. But his mother begged him to wait.

She took him to the room where he was born and in tears told him the one thing that made her widowhood easier was that John resembled his father. She reminded him that the young have their lives in front of them but that she would soon face death. She asked him to spare her a second loneliness and not leave her before she died.

"When you have committed me to the ground and united me with your father's bones," she pleaded, "then set out on your long travels and sail whatever sea you please. Then there will be nobody to hinder. But until I breathe my last, be content to live with me."

John relented and put off his plans for a few years.

Dodging Responsibility

In the early 370s, after his mother died, John entered monastic seclusion. He studied under the monk Diodore for a time and then lived as a hermit. John's ascetic rigors were so strenuous they damaged his health for the rest of his life. Still, this period hardened his spiritual resolve and focused his calling. In addition, he memorized large passages of Scripture, and his ability to quote passages from memory would empower his later sermons.

Though John eventually rejected monastic life for service in the church, he always prized contemplation. In one later sermon, he asked, "For what purpose did Christ go up into the mountain? To teach us that loneliness and retirement is good when we are to pray to God.... For the wilderness is the mother of quiet; it is a calm and a harbor, delivering us from all turmoils."

Before he had left for seclusion in the nearby hills, John had been ordained a "lector," a minor church official responsible for reading Scripture in worship. When he returned, he became active in the church of Antioch, serving under Meletius and then Flavian, successive archbishops. Both had suffered for their orthodoxy when Arians (who denied the divinity of Christ) had controlled church and state.

During this time, John and a close friend named Basil heard they were being considered for the ministry. Both felt inadequate for the heavy responsibility, but Basil finally agreed to be ordained when John implied they would do so together. Basil went forward with ordination—unaware that John had gone into hiding. John feared the demanding responsibility of the priestly office, but he did not want to deprive the church of Basil.

This act of duplicity led John to write one of his most famous works, ***On the Priesthood***, a justification of his deception and his dodging of the office he esteemed. It also contains glimpses of his core values and a mature philosophy of ministry—though John wrote it in when only in his twenties. For example: "I do not know whether anyone has ever succeeded in not enjoying praise. And if he enjoys it, he naturally wants to receive it. And if he wants to receive it, he cannot help being pained and distraught at losing it.... Men who are in love with applause have their spirits starved not only when they are blamed offhand, but even when they fail to be constantly praised."

Eventually, John was ordained a deacon (381) and finally a priest (386). Basil probably became bishop of a rural town in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). John, though, would eventually minister in one of the largest churches in Christendom.

Painfully Specific

First, however, John spent twelve years in Antioch, a city of great wealth and the capital of Syria. It was known for its Olympic games, theatrical presentations, and festivals. It was also the city where Chrysostom's preaching began to be noticed, especially after the infamous Affair of the Statues.

In the spring of 388, a rebellion erupted in Antioch over the announcement of increased taxes. Statues of the emperor and his recently deceased wife were desecrated. Officials of the empire then began punishing city leaders, killing some, for the uprising. While Archbishop Flavian rushed to the capital in Constantinople 800 miles away to beg for clemency, John preached to a city in turmoil:

> "Improve yourselves now truly, not as when during one of the numerous earthquakes or in famine or drought or in similar visitations you leave off your sinning for three or four days and then begin the old life again.... Stop evil slandering, harbor no enmities, and give up the wicked custom of frivolous cursing and swearing. If you do this, you will surely be delivered from the present distress and attain eternal happiness."

After eight weeks, on the day before Easter, Flavian returned with the good news of the emperor's pardon.

John preached through many of Paul's letters ("I like all the saints," he said, "but St. Paul the most of all—that vessel of election, the trumpet of heaven"), the Gospels of Matthew and of John, and the Book of Genesis. Changed lives were his goal, and he denounced sins from abortion to prostitution and from gluttony to swearing.

He encouraged his congregation not only to attend the divine service regularly but also to feed themselves on God's written Word. In a sermon on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, he said, "Reading the Scripture is a great means of security against sinning. The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation."

His applications could be forceful. About people's love of horse racing, he complained, "My sermons are applauded merely from custom, then everyone runs off to [horse racing] again and gives much more applause to the jockeys, showing indeed unrestrained passion for them! There they put their heads together with great attention, and say with mutual rivalry, 'This horse did not run well, this one stumbled,' and one holds to this jockey and another to that. No one thinks any more of my sermons, nor of the holy and awesome mysteries that are accomplished here."

Kidnapped

In early 398, John was taken by a senior military official to a chapel outside the city's walls. There he was seized by soldiers and transported 800 miles to the capital, where he was forcibly consecrated as archbishop of Constantinople.

John's kidnapping was arranged by Eutropius, a government official, who wanted to adorn the church in the capital city with the best orator in Christianity. John had never sought the office, but he accepted it as God's providence.

The archbishop in the capital of the eastern empire could be a potent force for Christianity. John's oratorical skills were second to none, and he had the potential of building a power base that would have enabled him to reform the city for decades. In his first few years, in fact, John saw two key victories for the church.

The first came when Eutropius fell from power. John had already taken aim at the extravagances that marked the ruling class. So when Eutropius fled to the church for sanctuary (believing the emperor sought his execution), it was a great vindication for John.

The following Sunday, while Eutropius stood in front of the congregation, John began his sermon, "O vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"

After rebuking Eutropius for his worldly behavior, John turned to the people: "I say this now, not in order to shame the fallen, but to exhort to prudence those who are still upright; not in order to push a shipwrecked person into the deep, but to warn the others before they are also shipwrecked."

After the sermon, John worked out with Emperor Arcadius an agreement to save the fallen official's life. (Eutropius, however, later broke the agreement and was beheaded.)

John's second victory came the next year, in 400. Gainas, an imperial general in charge of an army of Goth mercenaries, threatened to revolt and take over the city. He took three prominent officials as hostages. He also demanded that his troops, Arians by faith, be given a church in the capital in which to hold services. (Arianism had been condemned and outlawed 19 years earlier.)

Chrysostom inserted himself into the situation and negotiated the release of the hostages. Then he convinced the emperor to refuse Gainas's request for a church. The political and military momentum turned, and Gainas was defeated.

Afflicting the Comfortable

Within three years, however, John found himself in deep trouble.

John's blend of strengths and weaknesses had been ideally suited to his ministry at Antioch. His enthusiasm for the Christian life, his oratorical skills, and his knowledge of the Scriptures powered his preaching to great heights. Under the tactful, politically skillful leadership of archbishops Meletius and Flavian, the church at Antioch thrived.

In the capital city, however, the situation was more difficult for John. Archbishops controlled vast wealth, lived in palaces, and led thousands of church officials. By Chrysostom's day, the churches in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople each had approximately 100,000 members and hundreds of officers of various ranks. The coupling of economic and political power with the church's spiritual mandate attracted some people into ministry with wrong motives.

John's preaching against abuses of wealth and power affronted the imperial family and the ruling class. He was not skilled in church politics, and his lifestyle itself was a scandal to them: he lived an ascetic life, used his considerable household budget to care for the poor, and built hospitals. Furthermore, he always ate by himself, refusing to take part in the social life of the capital, which would have given him better relationships with those in power.

John's reforms began with celibate clergy who lived with "spiritual sisters"—single women who lived in monks' residences to tend to domestic matters. He preached that some of the "spiritual sisters" became "spiritual mothers."

John also ordered reforms in the order of widows: he advised some to enter a second marriage, and for those who remained in church service, he instituted stricter standards. He also disciplined bishops in Asia Minor for simony and financial misappropriation.

John exhorted his people to pray daily, and he held evening services for those who had to work during the day. He preached against the great public sins: horse racing and gambling, public swearing and vulgarity, and the indulgent use of wealth.

For example, in a sermon against the theater, he said: "If you see a shameless woman in the theater, who treads the stage with uncovered head and bold attitudes, dressed in garments adorned with gold, flaunting her soft sensuality, singing immoral songs, throwing her limbs about in the dance, and making shameless speeches ... do you still dare to say that nothing human happens to you then? Long after the theater is closed and everyone is gone away, those images still float before your soul, their words, their conduct, their glances, their walk, their positions, their excitation, their unchaste limbs —and as for you, you go home covered with a thousand wounds! But not alone—the whore goes with you—although not openly and visibly ... but in your heart, and in your conscience, and there within you she kindles the Babylonian furnace ... in which the peace of your home, the purity of your heart, the happiness of your marriage will be burnt up!"

The horse track in Constantinople was across the main square from the church where John preached, and he often condemned the noise that interrupted the services: "Still there are those who simply leave us here alone and run off to the circus and the charioteers and the horse races! So far have they yielded to their passions that they fill the whole city with their cries and unrestrained yelling, at which one would have to laugh if it were not so sad."

More than once, he threatened to withhold Communion from those who continued in immorality: "If some will still persevere in their moral corruption, they will finally be separated and cut off.... They will be excluded from the congregation. If you shudder with horror at this judgment, then let the guilty ones simply show repentance, and the judgment will be lifted."

Illegitimate Synod

Ironically, John's most formidable enemy turned out to be someone far outside his jurisdiction: Theophilus, the archbishop of Alexandria. Theophilus's hatred of John was doubly fueled. John had been consecrated bishop of Constantinople rather than his own candidate; furthermore, the influence of the Constantinople church had for some years been growing at the expense of his own in Alexandria.

Politically, John was no match for Theophilus and his allies. Even though John's powerful preaching drew great crowds, Theophilus's party easily mobilized the imperial couple and the ruling class against Chrysostom.

In the spring of 403, Theophilus's opportunity came. John welcomed four monks (the so-called "Tall Brothers") who had opposed Theophilus's management of church funds (Theophilus had a reputation for expensive building programs and for living lavishly). Theophilus, in turn, charged the monks with heresy, contending they adhered to the then-condemned views of Origen, the third-century theologian. John asked Theophilus to provide evidence for the charges.

When Theophilus came to Constantinople, he brought enough Egyptian bishops to declare a church council, which he quickly did, at an estate across the Bosporus from Constantinople. The illegitimate council forgot the four monks and proceeded to condemn John, based on trumped-up charges brought against him by disaffected clergy. He was deposed from the office of archbishop, and Emperor Arcadius removed him from the city.

When news got out, a riot erupted, and within days John was brought back and reinstated. Theophilus retreated to Alexandria.

Unfortunately, John again quickly alienated Empress Eudoxia with his preaching. Emperor Arcadius ordered John to leave the church and the city. John retorted that rulers could use force to remove a shepherd from his flock but no minister should abandon his divine calling.

Eventually troops were sent.

John, to forestall another riot, cooperated. To distract the people, he had his horse saddled and put by the public entrance to the cathedral. He then said farewell to loyal deaconesses and priests and left through a side door.

After his removal was discovered, the people again rioted, and somehow the cathedral church was set on fire; the flames spread to the senate house and other public buildings. Imperial troops forcefully put down all resistance. Some of John's followers were tortured and at least two died as a result.

Exile

John was transported across the plains of Asia Minor in the heat of summer but was allowed to stop in Caesarea because of failing health. He was visited by many loyal followers and was popular among the Christians in that region. He wrote letters to Olympias, his closest deaconess in Constantinople, describing the hard times he had endured and reminding her that God was in control:

> "When you see the church scattered, suffering the most terrible trials, her most illustrious members persecuted and flogged, her leader carried away into exile, don't only consider these events, but also the things that have resulted: the rewards, the recompense, the awards for the athlete who wins in the games and the prizes won in the contest."

Orders were given for him to be moved, this time to a remote village on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. But with his health failing, he collapsed on the way, on September 14, 407, and was taken to a small chapel outside of Comana. After he was dressed in a baptismal robe, he gave away his clothes to local villagers. He received the Lord's Supper and offered a final prayer that ended with his usual closing words, "Glory be to God in all things. Amen." He was buried in the small chapel at the end of the empire.

After John had been deposed, many of his supporters, called "Johnites," were driven into exile. Palladius, a bishop and friend of John, wrote a biographical defense of his friend. John himself wrote a letter to Innocent, archbishop of Rome, and other western bishops. These western leaders wanted to call a synod to investigate the matter but were politically powerless to force such a decision on the emperor in Constantinople.

Thirty-four years later, though, after John's chief enemies had died, his relics were brought back in triumph to the capital. Emperor Theodosius II publicly asked forgiveness for the sins of his parents, who had sent John into exile.

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Christian History
Issue 67: St. Augustine: Sinner, Bishop, Saint

The Dark Heart Filled With Light

Augustine's early years reveal an intense, proud, and sensual man who yearned to know truth.

Robert Payne

Few writers have captured Augustine's personality as vividly as did Robert Payne in "Augustine: The Sensualist" in The Fathers of the Western Church***. Payne (1911-1983) was a distinguished writer whose works included novels and non-fiction, biography and poetry, transaltion, and short stories. Though recent scholarship might nuance some of Payne's interpretations, his overall portrait of Augustine as a man stands. This excerpt, reprinted with permission, takes us from Augustine's youth to his famous conversion.***

Augustine belongs to our time. The most wanton of the saints, the man with the clearest mind, the most exalted opinion of himself, the subtlest knowledge of himself, he speaks a language we know only too well. He belongs to the times of crisis, when human minds go wheeling after the final purposes.

There is no leisure in him: he burns himself up with the fury to know all things, to determine all things. Named for two ruthless emperors, Augustine and Aurelius, he could be ruthless as well. And like the great modern psychological novelists, he is armed with a scalpel and is prepared to knife the soul until it reveals its secrets.

Problem child

"Augustine was a Numidian, one of those strange people who inhabited the northern coastal plains of Africa, neither black nor European, but descended like the Basques from some earlier race of settlers. He was tall and long limbed, thin chested, with sloping shoulders. He had a long nose, a high forehead, thick lips, and tremendous eyes, and he did not walk so much as take large, loping strides. His skin was a kind of dark bronze; his eyes were black.

He was born on Sunday, November 13, 354, in the town of Thagaste in what is now Algeria. It was a pleasant town with high white walls, set among wooded fields. Ilex and pines grew beside the streams, lions roamed in the forests, and boar, hare, redwing, and quail were to be hunted a stone's throw from the city walls.

The town, built by the Romans, had a theater, a forum, baths, long colonnades of marble columns, and a marketplace of some importance. Among the patricians who ruled over the destiny of the town was a certain Patricius, a landowner who possessed a farm and a number of slaves. He seems to have been a stern taskmaster who was never quite reconciled to having Augustine for a son.

There were good reasons for this. The child had an ungovernable temper. He lied often, he liked playing more than he liked study, and he was also a thief, on his own confession. Worse still for Patricius, the son possessed a desperate affection for his mother, Monica, and none for his father.

Patricius, a stern old member of "the very splendid council of Thagaste," possessing all the privileges of the minor nobility (though not an abundance of wealth), desired above everything that Augustine should become a man of culture. Beyond that, he had little interest in the child, allowed the boy to do as he pleased, and cared nothing at all about his morals. When much later Augustine drew up the

balance sheet of his father's behavior, the greatest crime of Patricius was precisely that he allowed the boy to be as immoral as he pleased.

Monica was 22 when Augustine was born. There was already an elder son, Navigius, and a daughter, her name unknown, who became a nun. It is possible that Augustine deliberately omitted to record her name for the same reason that he never mentioned the name of his mistress or that of a young man he once bitterly grieved over: in some deep way, she may have hurt him. He was easily hurt.

Augustine spent much time playing a curious game called "nuts." In this game, three seashells and a pea are shuffled dexterously together, and the winner is the one who discovers under which seashell the pea is hidden. Augustine played the game well, but he bitterly denounced others with quicker fingers who cheated better than himself.

He stole from the kitchen, from the cellar, and from the table. He was a convincing liar to his tutor and to his schoolmasters. He was an excellent shot with a stone and won "splendid victories" against schoolboys whose gashed and bleeding faces were evidence of his prowess.

As for his lessons, Augustine had an abiding horror of them. Most of all he detested arithmetic and Greek: Greek because it was difficult, and arithmetic because it was senseless. "What on earth," he asked, "is the use of repeating one plus two equals three?" He was thrashed repeatedly in school, for impudence and for playing dice and bones in class. Years later when he was an old man and wore the miter of a bishop, the memory of those thrashings remained vivid in his mind; he would conjure up in an agony of remorse the stripes on the bleeding flesh.

Young lust

At 12 he was sent to school at Madaura, an old Numidian city, proud of its antiquity and pagan to the core. For the first time, he fell in love with letters. He read Virgil, weeping over Dido's death; he studied well, received an unusually large allowance from his father, and appears to have joined a pagan sect (years later an old Madauran grammarian called Maximus rebuked him for deviating from paganism).

Also, he read love poetry. His senses had always been keen, and in this hot city, his first experiments in sensuality occurred. It was not love but raging lust. He speaks about these things openly, with little compassion for his own wayward youth.

"I dared to roam the woods and pursue my vagrant loves beneath the shades," he says, perhaps referring to the woods surrounding Madaura or perhaps referring only to the shelters where lovers lie. "Lord, how loathsome I was in Thy sight," he says in his ***Confessions***. "[Lust] stormed confusedly within me, whirling my thoughtless youth over the precipices of desire, and so I wandered still further from Thee, and Thou didst leave me to myself: the torrent of my fornications tossed and swelled and boiled and ran over."

But unchastity was not his only sin. Once, during his holidays, he robbed a pear tree. He tells of the event with a quite extraordinary psychological profundity. He desired to rob the tree, and he did rob it, but he was impelled neither by hunger nor poverty. In fact he did not want the pears at all; there were better ones in his own orchard.

Even after the theft he took no joy in what he had stolen. "But I took joy," he says, "in the theft and in the sin." His knowledge of sin was to increase prodigiously in later years.

Augustine's father died when he was 16. He would have been forced to become a workman if Romanian, a distinguished citizen of Thagaste, had not come to his help. Romanian was wealthy and given to fits

of generosity, and he was so highly respected that even during his lifetime his statue was erected in the marketplace. Augustine worshiped him and was given an allowance. He had shown talent in literature already, and now Romanian sent him to Carthage to study.

Carthage was the place he had dreamed of, the greatest seaport of the western Mediterranean, a place of legends, dedicated to the gods Astarte and Venus, a softly shining city between the lakes and the sea, with her capitol and her palatine and her teeming colleges. "Carthage," wrote Apuleius, "is the heavenly muse of Africa, the inspirer of the Roman people," and so it was. All the races congregated there.

The city was pagan. The goddess Tanit was worshiped, disguised now under the name of ***Virgo Coelestis***, the Virgin of Heaven. Augustine attended the ceremonies performed for the goddess. "Our eager eyes," he said, "rested in turn on the goddess and on the girls, her adorers."

Talking in Punic, mingling with the crowds, enjoying life with a mistress, his blood rising to fever heat, his father dead and his mother far away, Augustine threw himself into the delights of the city.

Before he left Thagaste to come to Carthage, his mother had given him a solemn warning:

> "My mother commanded me not to commit fornication, and especially that I should not defile any man's wife. This seemed to me no better than women's counsels, which it would be a shame for me to follow. ... I ran headlong with such blindness that I was ashamed among my equals to be guilty of less impudence than they were, whom I heard brag mightily of their naughtiness; yea, and so much the more boasting by how much more they had been beastly; and I took pleasure to do it, not for the pleasure of the act only, but for the praise of it also."

Fevers of the mind

However, a change was coming over him. Though the fevers of the flesh remained, there were now fevers of the mind. He threw himself into his studies, becoming an excellent Latin scholar: he went on to study rhetoric, mathematics, music, and philosophy. "My unquiet mind was altogether intent to seek for learning," he wrote.

He made friends easily, and some, like Alypius, Nebridius, and Honoratus, became friends for life. He read the book of Cicero called the ***Hortensius***, which survives only in fragments. He also began to ponder how he should spend his life: it occurred to him that one could hardly spend it better than in acquiring wisdom.

But what was wisdom? Some students spoke of Christ, others of Mani, the Persian who had suffered crucifixion and introduced a sacrament of bread and fruit. Mani had affirmed the eternal coexistence of two kingdoms, one of darkness, the other of light. Eternal war was waged between light and darkness, between good and evil.

Mani proclaimed that he was an apostle of Christ, who, Mani argued, was not born, never became a man, and never died. Manicheism had much in common with Gnostic Christianity. Its dualistic belief, its hatred of established Christianity, and its oddly unconvincing demonology made Christians abhor it.

Augustine confessed later that it was because the Manichees spoke of "truth" that he was seduced into believing them; if they had used some other word he might not have fallen so easily. He had decided that he prized truth most, and he would rise in the Manichean hierarchy, for he was already disposed to be ambitious.

Having joined the sect, he returned to Thagaste, only to discover that Monica, who had grown even more fervent in her Christian faith during his absence, regarded him now as a sinner fallen beyond redemption. She threw him out of the house.

Augustine simply walked to the house of Romanian, explained the situation, and was allowed to lodge in the rich man's villa as tutor to his son Licentius. He continued to earn acclaim from his speeches, he played with astrology, he enjoyed the pleasant life of a rich man's adopted son, he acquired a taste for expensive things, and he knew perfectly well that in all Thagaste there was no one so brilliant, so promising as Augustine.

Then the bubble burst. His closest friend, "the one who was sweet to me above all sweetness of this life," died. What was worse, when his friend became deathly ill, he received the Christian sacrament. Augustine was appalled. The boy had been a Manichee. They spent their leisure time together, discussed everything together: why had he suddenly changed his religion?

Augustine never discovered the answer to the question. "I resolved to wait until he should regain his strength, then I would speak frankly with him." But though strength returned for a while, a few days later the boy died.

Wild panic of grief

Confronted with death, Augustine threw himself into a wild panic of grief. "This darkness fell upon my heart," he wrote, "and wherever I looked there was only death. My country became a torture, my father's house pure melancholy. All the pleasures I had shared with him turned into hideous agony now that he was gone. My eyes sought for him everywhere, and found him not. I hated all familiar sights because he was not there."

This grief cleared the way for his conversion. He remained a little while longer a Manichee, but he could not prevent himself from thinking of the boy's death. There followed the long struggle between the Manichee and the Christian in Augustine's soul.

Shortly after the death of his friend, Augustine found himself debating with Faustus, the most learned Manichee in North Africa, and doubts began to arise over the relevance of the Persian religion. Was evil a substance? Did the Manichees promise the resurrection of the flesh?

He was restless: there were no satisfactory answers to these questions. Then where was truth? Monica, who had forgiven him and now allowed him to live under her roof, insisted that the truth lay with Christ.

Augustine thought the truth probably lay in a legal career in Rome: he would become another Cicero. He decided to leave for Rome as soon as possible. Monica clung to him, refused to let him go.

He was adept at subterfuge, and when everything was prepared for the journey, he allowed Monica to accompany him to the seashore. He pretended he had a friend on one of the boats in the harbor and promised to return in the morning. That night Monica spent in a small oratory sacred to the memory of Cyprian, the protector of Carthage. When she woke up, her son was gone.

Putting away old loves

In Rome Augustine still held to the remnants of his belief in Manicheism, a belief he shared with his old school friend Alypius, who sought him out and stayed close to him during the ensuing years. Augustine fell ill, apparently of a malarial infection, and thereafter the debate with himself grew

more relentless. Where was the truth? In beauty? In God? In the war between the forces of light and darkness? There were moments when he gave way to a savage nihilism, and other moments when he flirted with Neoplatonism.

All the time he continued his studies in rhetoric, until he became the most brilliant of the young disputants in Rome. The Roman prefect was Symmachus, who had close connections with Manicheism. When the university of Milan asked through the prefect for a new teacher of rhetoric, Symmachus pointed to Augustine.

By the time Augustine reached Milan, he was prepared to abandon the Manichees. Their arguments were too arbitrary.

"They say the golden melon comes from God's treasure house, but the golden fat of the ham and the yolk of an egg are evil," he wrote. "Why so? And why does the whiteness of lettuce proclaim to them the divinity, while the whiteness of cream proclaims only evil? And why this horror of meat? For, look you, roast suckling pig offers us a brilliant color, an agreeable smell, an appetizing taste—sure sign, according to them, of the divine presence." Manicheism was rooted in materialism; Augustine's spirit, like his wit, was already taking wings.

Everyone in Milan called on Ambrose, and Augustine was not long in calling upon the bishop who already bore the character of a saint. "He received me," wrote Augustine, "like a father and was pleased enough at my coming in a bishoply fashion." Ambrose was held in honor; Augustine evidently envied the aura of dignity surrounding him. Also, Ambrose was noted for his style in delivering sermons—another cause for envy.

Milan was the imperial capital, the residence of the boy Emperor Valentinian II. In this brilliant court, Augustine hoped to find a sinecure. His earnings already made him comparatively wealthy: he could afford to pay for the passage of his Carthaginian mistress and her son, Adeodatus. He was popular. He had a villa, and there were a number of friends from Carthage to make him feel at home: his brother Navigius, two cousins Rusticus and Latidianus, Alypius, and a few others.

Soon he invited Monica, and Monica decided the time had come for her son to put his mistress aside and take a wife of higher social status. He could keep the boy, but the girl must go. For some reason Augustine consented. "When they took from my side her with whom I had slept for so long, my heart was torn at the place where it stuck to hers, and the wound was bleeding."

There followed what may have been the most painful period of his life. Monica prayed, hoping against hope that he would alter his ways, become a Christian, and surrender to the will of God.

The crisis, long expected and long prayed for, came in July 386. When he came to speak about this strangeness that came to him, he could find no better description than that it possessed the quality of a steady, perfect light.

"At such times," he wrote, "I am conscious of something within me that plays before my soul and is light dancing in front of it; were this brought into steadiness and perfection in me, it would surely be eternal life."

But there were not many times when he was aware of this light, and all his life by his own account he was fully aware of it only once—in a garden, on a hot summer's day.

"Why not now?"

As Augustine tells the story, the day began ordinarily enough. He was staying in the villa with Alypius and his mother. There came a visitor, an officer of the imperial household called Pontitian, an African and a Christian, who had arrived from Treves.

They sat down to talk, and suddenly Pontitian observed a book lying on the table, a table that had been marked out for a game of dominoes. Pontitian opened the book idly and was surprised to discover that it contained the epistles of Paul. Delighted, he spoke of his own conversion, of Antony and the anchorites of Egypt, then of the monasteries of Italy, and particularly of the monastery outside the walls of Milan where Ambrose sometimes officiated.

Pontitian praised the ascetic life and told the story of two of his friends who, upon reading ***The Life of St. Antony***, determined to join a monastery. Some days later, the women to whom they were betrothed had also become Christians and were dedicated to virginity.

Augustine was more moved than he had ever been in his life—especially by the thought of young brides committing to chastity. It seemed to him at last that he was being compelled to confront himself, seeing himself foul, crooked, and defiled with the habit of lechery, and now there must be an end to it.

When Pontitian was gone, Augustine turned to Alypius. "What is the matter with us?" he exclaimed. "Yes, what is it? Didn't you hear? Simple men take heaven by violence, but we, heartless and learned, see how we wallow in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow because others have gone before, and not ashamed not even to follow?"

His mind was on fire. Alypius could hardly recognize him, so changed was his expression, and when Augustine threw himself out of the house, Alypius followed him closely, perhaps afraid he would harm himself.

Resting in the garden, Augustine found himself confronted again with the problem of the will. The old temptations returned, more cunning than ever, until he could bear the presence of Alypius no longer and flung himself weeping out of the garden, finding solitude under a remote fig tree. There he babbled like a child; "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why should there not be an end to my uncleanness now?"

Almost he expected to hear God summoning him out of the clouds, but the voice he heard came from an unknown child, chanting: ***"Tolle, lege"*** ("Take up and read"). For Augustine the words came like an angelic visitation.

No longer weeping, he rose to his feet and ran to the place where Alypius was sitting with the epistles of Paul beside him. Augustine opened the book, and his eyes fell on the verse from the Epistle to the Romans where Paul demands that the servant of Christ should renounce all voluptuous pleasures: "Let us live honorably, as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (13:13-14).

He put his finger in the page, calm at last, and with Alypius beside him, he went into the house to tell the story to Monica. She was overjoyed, radiant with exultation, for the dream of her son converted had at last come true.

A vision of momentary brightness

Though Augustine was finally converted and never again lost his faith in God, temptations remained. He had loved "the perishable beauty of the body, the brightness of the light, the soft melody of songs,

the delicious scent of flowers and the limbs made for the embracing of the flesh." His hot blood was not stilled by conversion: like many others, he would have to wait until he was old before the fleshly demon was silenced.

He was the least calm of the saints, the most impetuous, and even after his conversion, he was able to talk about doubt as though he understood the matter well enough. Yet he was sustained by the vision in the garden of momentary brightness, a vision he could never explain away. All he could say was that "it was as though the light of salvation had been poured into my heart."

EYE-OPENING EPISTLES

It's no coincidence that Augustine was reading Paul's letters on the day of his conversion. He would have first studied Paul with the Manichees, who considered the apostle (at least in their excerpts from his writings) an excellent prophet of Mani. Augustine first heard a Christian interpretation from Ambrose, who preached on Paul while Augustine attended his church. Augustine really dove into Paul's words when he was weighing the claims of the Neoplatonists; he dismissed their notions because truths about God's love and grace "came home to me when I read the least of your apostles." Later, Paul's influence dominated much of Augustine's theology, particularly his writings on the Law, original sin, human will, salvation, and eschatology.

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Christian History
Issue 67: St. Augustine: Sinner, Bishop, Saint

The Bishop at Work

Augustine saw himself not as a saint, but as a pastor with a job to do.

Bruce L. Shelley

In the tenth book of his ***Confessions***, Augustine tells us that his life as a bishop was a life of sin, and he repents of all the sins of his ministry—all the rancor and conflict, all the failures at love and peace.

A striking example of Augustine's ministerial errors occurred in 423 as he was turning 70. When Antonius, a pastor he had ordained, turned out to be a destructive scoundrel, Augustine offered to retire.

He confessed, "In my haste and lack of due precaution, I have inflicted a tragedy."

The pope, of course, declined the bishop's resignation. But Augustine, having a high view of the church and a low view of human nature, never considered himself to be above reproach. He was not a saint in his own day, but a working pastor committed to caring for his congregation, administering justice, and communicating God's truth.

Pastoral duties

Though Augustine had many administrative obligations as bishop, his first duty was serving God and the Christian community at Hippo. He baptized, catechized, and administered the sacraments to his people. "Thy servants, my brothers," he said of them, "Thy sons, my masters."

Augustine had been a monk before becoming a bishop, and he continued his monastic lifestyle—with significant modifications, such as living in the bishop's house instead of the monastery. A man in his position was expected to show hospitality, and frequent guests would shatter the silence of a monastic community.

In the fourth century, the Christian bishop was an important figure in the Roman world. Because of this, Augustine was particularly concerned with the image he and his fellow clergy presented. So many critics pounced on perceived failings that Augustine once quoted the psalmist's words, "They that sat in the gate spoke against me: and they that drank wine made me their song."

He routinely visited those who needed help. But he adhered to the biblical counsel to visit only widows and the fatherless in their afflictions. He took this as a rule designed to avoid accusations that he cared only for the rich (unlike the clerics Jerome mocked for ingratiating themselves with wealthy old men, "catching their spittle in their hands when they cough"). He also refused all invitations to feasts within his diocese.

Extremely frugal in his personal life, he wore a cloak usually worn by laymen, and he protested when well-meaning persons sent him gifts of costly clothing.

Late in life he remarked, "An expensive robe would embarrass me: it would not suit my profession nor my principles, and it would look strange on these old limbs, with my white hairs."

Though disciplined, Augustine was no slave to his own rules. Once a consecrated virgin named Sapida sent him a tunic made with her own hands. The garment was originally intended for her brother Timothy, but he had died before receiving his sister's present. So Sapida presented the tunic to Augustine, telling him it would be a great comfort for her if he would accept it.

In his thank-you note (which mentioned that he was wearing the tunic), Augustine reminded her that her brother, for whom she had made an earthly garment, was now clothed with an incorruptible robe of immortality.

The judge-pastor

As the Roman Empire became Christianized, church leaders were assigned increasing civic responsibilities. By Augustine's time, Roman law empowered a city's Christian bishop to impose a settlement, by arbitration, on consenting parties.

This ministry of judging was rooted in the apostolic age, specifically in Paul's injunction that Christians should not take legal action against other believers in a court of unbelievers (1 Cor. 6:1-6). The bishop-judge's duty, then, was to sense the need of the moment and move quickly to impose a firm, clear settlement based on Christian principles.

Augustine's reputation for fairness brought many litigants—pagans, heretics, and Christians. On occasion he would skip all his meals in order to settle the cases before him that day.

Some situations pitted the principles of justice and mercy against each other. In 408 at Calama, where Augustine's friend Possidius was bishop, local pagans staged two riots. They raided the deacon's lodgings, killed a monk in the street, and went looking for Possidius, who heard from his hiding place, "Where's the bishop? If we don't get him, we'll have wasted our time!"

Peace officers did nothing to stop the violence and looting. But when the rebels came to their senses, they realized how serious their acts were. So when Augustine came to Calama a bit later to visit Possidius, a group approached him, begging him to intercede for them.

Nectarius, a respectable pagan in the group, wrote to Augustine urging him to use his influence so that extreme penalties (torture and execution) could be avoided. Nectarius admitted that the rioters should be punished, but it is not for a bishop, he argued, to seek anything but the welfare of individuals and to obtain pardon from omnipotent God for the offenses of others.

Augustine replied that, while he had no desire to see anyone tortured or executed, he did wish to see justice served. Also, as similar acts of terrorism (perpetrated by both pagans and heretics) were on the rise throughout the empire, he hoped the Calama case would serve as an example to other would-be rioters.

After eight months of inaction, the government imposed heavy penalties on the pagans, though not the death penalty.

Nectarius again appealed to Augustine, asking for a general pardon because "as the Stoics were in the habit of saying, all sins were equally great," and no one deserved special censure. This Augustine would not endorse, and he removed himself from the matter.

Two-way communicator

With his training in rhetoric, Augustine was not entirely out of place in a court of law. But he felt most at

home in the pulpit.

His relationship with his congregation was remarkable. His conversational style was laced with questions tossed to his listeners, and he frequently elicited applause or some vocal response from them. Sensitivity trumped classical structure: Augustine, who always used "we" when addressing his listeners, said, "It is better that we should ... be understood by you than be artists in speech and talk past you."

Though many of Augustine's sermons were preserved, they were transcribed from his speaking, not written beforehand. He spoke from rough notes at most, and sometimes not even those; if the lector accidentally read the wrong Scripture, Augustine was known to ignore his prepared message and speak ***ex tempore*** instead.

"In these circumstances I prefer to conform to the error of the lector and the will of God rather than to follow my own," he said.

He always watched for tangible evidence of the power of the living Word in his audience. He knew he had touched hearts when he saw tears. If they seemed bored, he might quickly change subjects or stop speaking altogether.

The preacher tested

Augustine's most challenging preaching came during the fall of Rome, as fear and despair descended on the people of Hippo.

When the news broke, 56-year-old Augustine was following doctor's orders and convalescing at a country estate. His first response was to write to Hippo and urge the other ministers and the people not to waste their time grieving but to give aid to the steady stream of refugees.

The North Africans welcomed the threadbare refugees descending from the ships and heard them tell the horrors of the invasion—palaces burnt, spacious gardens in ruins, rich men hunted like wild beasts. The Romans living in North Africa soon joined the chorus from Rome: Why? Why? Why?

In response Augustine preached that the Lord God had not forgotten his people. Far from it. He had in fact had a hand in the catastrophe at Rome, as the Great Tester of Faith.

The Roman world, he explained, was like a furnace in which God burns like a fire to consume the straw while enriching and purifying the gold. Augustine even dared to attack the people's widespread murmuring against God for the trouble they had experienced.

"Was it the purpose of the Apostles' ***memoriae*** to safeguard your idiotic theaters?" he asked. "Did Peter die and was his body buried in Rome so that not a stone of your theaters should be displaced?"

The people resisted his words. Some told him to "keep off the subject of Rome."

Then his messages turned somewhat defensive. "Vent your anger against me if you will," he said. "However deeply we may be moved, we shall not curse you back, and if we are slandered by you, we shall only pray for you the more."

To make sense of suffering on a scale that had taken his congregation by complete surprise, the great North African turned to a familiar local image: the olive press.

All through the summer, the olives hung on branches that waved in the breeze. Then at the end of the year, they would be beaten down and crushed in the oil presses. So, Augustine preached, "Now is the end of the year. Now is the time to be pressed."

But he saw more than destruction in the events of 410. He knew that pressing was a process that aimed at positive results. Through it, good oil was set free to run into the vats. The world reels under crushing blows, he preached, the flesh is pressed, and the spirit turns to clear, flowing oil.

Augustine had felt that purifying pressure in his own life, and he extended its work to his congregation. Yet a pastor's duty was not just pressing down—it was an enormously complex role.

He described a pastor's job this way: "Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 67: St. Augustine: Sinner, Bishop, Saint

Fighting Words

Forged in the heat of theological battle, Augustine's five most distinctive teachings remain controversial.

Roger E. Olson

Despite Augustine's long and dominating shadow over 1,500 years of Western church history, his central ideas have not been universally accepted or uniformly interpreted. The Eastern Orthodox regard some of Augustine's key ideas as pernicious, if not heretical. Anabaptists have rejected much of his theology, while Protestants in general claim selected teachings and ignore others.

Nonetheless, Augustine is widely regarded as the church's most influential philosopher and theologian. His five central ideas were forged in the heat of theological conflict, and they remain controversial today:

1. The nature and source of evil.
2. The nature of the church and its sacraments.
3. Original sin.
4. The relationship of grace and free will.
5. Predestination.

Augustine refined each of these doctrines as he battled what he believed were heresies, or at least false worldviews: a dualistic "cult" known as the Manichees, a Christian sect in North Africa known as the Donatists, and the beliefs of a British monk named Pelagius and his followers. Augustine's distinctive teachings are essentially answers to these theological enemies.

Evil nothings

One of the most pressing theological problems in Augustine's time was how to justify belief in an omnipotent and perfectly good Creator when sin and evil were obviously deeply woven into the created beings.

The Manichees taught that two eternal beings control the universe, one of them good and the other evil. Even if the all-good deity is superior, they argued, it cannot at present conquer or control the evil one. The Manichees also taught that evil is intrinsically associated with matter and that only spirit is good. Thus, the good deity created spirits but not matter.

Against this double dualism (reminiscent of both Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism), Augustine developed an idea he believed was consistent with biblical revelation and the best of philosophy: evil is not some "thing" or "substance" but only the privation of the good (***privatio boni***). It is to goodness what darkness is to light.

The source of evil, then, is not God's creation (how could God create "non-being"?) but the misuse of human free will. According to Augustine, evil "is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order that belong to nature." Elsewhere Augustine wrote, "The only evil thing is an evil will."

The vast majority of later Christian thinkers depended on Augustine's "theodicy" (defense of God) to reconcile the reality of evil with God's goodness. Some Christians, though, have found Augustine's concept

of evil insufficient to account for the power and types of evil we experience. Nonetheless, Augustine's response to dualism was largely triumphant over Manicheism.

Church as a mixed bag

Augustine also fought with the Donatists, especially their perfectionist theology of the church.

Donatists believed the grace of God could be found only in an undefiled church, and since they restricted their membership to those they believed to be true saints, they believed they had a monopoly on grace. Thus they considered only their baptism and Lord's Supper valid.

Augustine, however, argued that the church is both universal (not limited to a particular branch) and mixed (some members saved, others not). Only God can know definitely which baptized persons are truly regenerate. Augustine accused the Donatists of a sin worse than condoning impurity: dividing the church.

Augustine and the Donatists also differed on the qualifications of priests. Donatist priests had to be morally pure; specifically they must not have lapsed during Roman persecution. Augustine, like his North African predecessor Cyprian of Carthage, based priestly authority not on irreproachable behavior but on the criterion of apostolic succession—Jesus' disciples laid hands on the next generation of leaders, who laid hands on the next, and so on.

Augustine contended that God's saving grace was conveyed ***ex opere operato***, that is, by Christ himself through his priests ***regardless of their character or beliefs***. If the recipient of the sacrament is not resisting grace, and if the priest performing the sacrament is rightly ordained and in good standing with the Catholic church, grace is conveyed. The human priest is merely Christ's extended hand in the sacrament.

"What these [priests] administer," wrote one Augustine scholar, "is the baptism of Christ, whose sanctity cannot be corrupted by unworthy ministers, any more than the light of the sun is corrupted by shining through a sewer."

Augustine's ideas became the Catholic church's bulwarks against all forms of sectarian and schismatic reform. Even the "magisterial" reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Cranmer) accepted most of Augustine's answers to Donatism, though they all rejected ***ex opere operato***, arguing that recipients of the Eucharist must have faith for grace to be effective. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, rejected these ideas and repeated Donatism's insistence on a pure, or at least regenerate, church.

Of human bondage

Augustine's notions of original sin, grace and free will, and predestination are inextricably bound together, and they were shaped by his debates with the Pelagians.

Augustine believed that humankind suffers from original sin, meaning that since the fall of Adam, we are depraved—incapable of doing good without supernatural help. The commands of God to do good were given, Augustine concluded, simply to point out our inability and throw us on the mercy of God.

Pelagius, however, believed that if God commands us to live good and even morally perfect lives, he must give us the ability to obey ***without any special, supernatural assistance***. Thus Pelagians denied there was any "original sin" or "depravity." Instead of being "depraved," the only disadvantage we currently have is that, living in a sinful world, we are more likely to develop sinful habits. Sin is a social disease, not an inherited spiritual-genetic defect.

Thus, Pelagius concluded, we are capable of living sinless lives simply by exercising our wills for the good. "A man can be without sin and keep the commandments of God, if he wishes," he wrote, "for this ability has been given to him by God."

Augustine was more outraged by Pelagius than by any other rival, and in response, he argued even more forcefully that we are born condemned for Adam's sin and incapable of not sinning.

"A man's free will," he wrote against Pelagius, "avails for nothing except to sin." Only the supernatural power of God's grace, imparted through baptism, could heal the deadly wound of sin upon the human soul. (Hence the need for infant baptism—to heal that wound immediately.)

Furthermore, only the power of God's grace could restore in some measure the free will lost in the fall of Adam's race. Grace cannot be received by an act of human will or even cooperated with (synergism)—it must be given as a gift.

"The Spirit of grace therefore causes us to have faith," he wrote, "in order that through faith we may, upon praying for it, obtain the ability to do what we are commanded."

The chosen few

Why do only some receive this gift of faith? In ***On the Predestination of the Saints***, written not long before he died, Augustine concluded that God simply chooses some persons out of the mass of fallen humanity to save and leaves others to their deserved condemnation. The reason some are so graced and others passed over lies only in "the hidden determinations of God."

The basic outlines of what later came to be known as "Calvinism" are found in Augustine's later anti-Pelagian writings. The Catholic church appropriated some of these ideas, such as inherited guilt (though not total depravity) and the absolute necessity of supernatural grace for meritorious works of righteousness. However, Catholic theology by and large passed over Augustine's doctrine of predestination in favor of an emphasis on human cooperation with grace after baptism.

Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and other reformers reaffirmed Augustine's doctrine of predestination, inherited depravity, and the sovereignty of grace—though Anabaptists and other radical reformers rejected the same (but without affirming Pelagianism).

Most theologians define their positions in relation to Augustine's doctrines. Almost all of them can appeal to something in the great North African church father, and almost all of them neglect some aspects of his teaching in favor of others. But no one after him can ignore him. Augustine's teachings on these and other controversial subjects have determined much of the agenda for Christian theology for a millennium and a half.

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Influencing the Influencers

Martin Luther refers to Augustine more often than to any other theologian, echoing, for example, his gloomy view of human will: "Where reason is in error and the will turned away, what good can man attempt or perform?" But Luther felt he had moved beyond Augustine on the matter of justification: "In the beginning I devoured Augustine, but when the door into Paul swung open and I knew what justification by faith really was, then it was out with him."

Thomas Aquinas cited Augustine when defending his views on original sin and infant baptism: "According to the Catholic Faith we are bound to hold that the first sin of the first man is transmitted to his descendants, by way of origin. For this reason children are taken to be baptized soon after their birth, to show that they have to be washed from some uncleanness. The contrary is part of the Pelagian heresy, as is clear from Augustine in many of his books."

John Calvin, when accused by the Roman Catholic church of theological innovation, argued that he was instead hearkening back to Augustine: "Augustine is so completely of our persuasion, that if I should have to make written profession, it would be quite enough to present a composition made up entirely of excerpts from his writings."

When English Reformer **Thomas Cranmer** commissioned a portrait of himself from Gerlach Flicke, he had a copy of Augustine's ***De Fide et Operibus*** ("On Faith and Works") painted on the table in front of him. In Cranmer's personal copy of the book, he had underlined the phrase "a good life is indeed inseparable from faith."

Anabaptist leader **Menno Simons** disagreed with Augustine on many things, including church leadership, the nature of Christian community, and infant baptism. In fact, he dismissed any influence when he wrote that if Augustine and other church fathers could support their teaching "with the Word and command of God, we will admit that they are right. If not, then it is a doctrine of men and accursed according to the Scriptures."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 60: How the Irish Were Saved

Patrick the Saint

Behind the fanciful legends of the fifth-century British missionary stands a man worthy of embellishment.

Mary Cagney

A fleet of 50 ***currachs*** (longboats) weaved its way toward the shore, where a young Roman Brit and his family walked. His name was Patricius, the 16-year-old son of a civil magistrate and tax collector. He had heard stories of Irish raiders who captured slaves and took them "to the ends of the world," and as he studied the longboats, he no doubt began imagining the worst.

With no Roman army to protect them (Roman legions had long since deserted Britain to protect Rome from barbarian invasions), Patricius and his town were unprepared for attack. The Irish warriors, wearing helmets and armed with spears, descended on the pebbled beach. The braying war horns struck terror into Patricius's heart, and he started to run toward town.

The warriors quickly demolished the village, and as Patricius darted among burning houses and screaming women, he was caught. The barbarians dragged him aboard a boat bound for the east coast of Ireland.

Patricius, better known as Patrick, is remembered today as the saint who drove the snakes out of Ireland, the teacher who used the shamrock to explain the Trinity, and the namesake of annual parades in New York and Boston. What is less well-known is that Patrick was a humble missionary (this saint regularly referred to himself as "a sinner") of enormous courage. When he evangelized Ireland, he set in motion a series of events that impacted all of Europe. It all started when he was carried off into slavery around 430.

Escape from sin and slavery

Patrick was sold to a cruel warrior chief, whose opponents' heads sat atop sharp poles around his palisade in Northern Ireland. While Patrick minded his master's pigs in the nearby hills, he lived like an animal himself, enduring long bouts of hunger and thirst. Worst of all, he was isolated from other human beings for months at a time. Early missionaries to Britain had left a legacy of Christianity that young Patrick was exposed to and took with him into captivity. He had been a nominal Christian to this point; he now turned to the Christian God of his fathers for comfort.

"I would pray constantly during the daylight hours," he later recalled. "The love of God and the fear of him surrounded me more and more. And faith grew. And the spirit roused so that in one day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and at night only slightly less."

On The Mountain. Legend holds that Patrick rang a large bell

After six years of slavery, Patrick received a supernatural message. "You do well to fast," a mysterious voice said to him. "Soon you will return to your homeland."

Before long, the voice spoke again: "Come and see, your ship is waiting for you." So Patrick fled and ran 200 miles to a southeastern harbor. There he boarded a ship of traders, probably carrying Irish wolfhounds to the European continent.

After a three-day journey, the men landed in Gaul (modern France), where they found

(held in a reliquary, at the National Museum of Ireland) on the top of Eagle Mountain, now called Croagh Patrick. Depending on the legend, the bell scared away either Ireland's snakes or its demons. Patrick's other relic, a staff supposedly given to him by Jesus, was burned as an object of superstition in 1538.

only devastation. Goths or Vandals had so decimated the land that no food was to be found in the once fertile area.

"What have you to say for yourself, Christian?" the ship's captain taunted. "You boast that your God is all powerful. We're starving to death, and we may not survive to see another soul."

Patrick answered confidently. "Nothing is impossible to God. Turn to him and he will send us food for our journey."

At that moment, a herd of pigs appeared, "seeming to block our path." Though Patrick instantly became "well regarded in their eyes," his companions offered their new-found food in sacrifice to their pagan gods.

Patrick did not partake.

The prodigious son returns

Many scholars believe Patrick then spent a period training for ministry in Lerins, an island off the south of France near Cannes. But his autobiographical ***Confession*** includes a huge gap after his escape from Ireland. When it picks up again "after a few years," he is back in Britain with his family.

It was there that Patrick received his call to evangelize Ireland—a vision like the apostle Paul's at Troas, when a Macedonian man pleaded, "Help us!"

"I had a vision in my dreams of a man who seemed to come from Ireland," Patrick wrote. "His name was Victoricius, and he carried countless letters, one of which he handed over to me. I read aloud where it began: 'The Voice of the Irish.' And as I began to read these words, I seemed to hear the voice of the same men who lived beside the forest of Foclut ... and they cried out as with one voice, 'We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.' I was deeply moved in heart and I could read no further, so I awoke."

Despite his reputation, Patrick wasn't really the first to bring Christianity to Ireland. Pope Celestine I sent a bishop named Palladius to the island in 431 (about the time Patrick was captured as a slave). Some scholars believe that Palladius and Patrick are one and the same individual, but most believe Palladius was unsuccessful (possibly martyred) and Patrick was sent in his place.

In any event, paganism was still dominant when Patrick arrived on the other side of the Irish Sea. "I dwell among gentiles," he wrote, "in the midst of pagan barbarians, worshipers of idols, and of unclean things."

Demons and druids

Patrick did not require the native Irish to surrender their belief in supernatural beings. They were only to regard these beings in a new light as demons. The fear of the old deities was transformed into hatred of demons. If Christianity had come to Ireland with only theological doctrines, the hope of immortal life, and ethical ideas—without miracles, mysteries, and rites—it could have never wooed the Celtic heart.

Predictably, Patrick faced the most opposition from the druids, who practiced magic, were skilled in secular learning (especially law and history) and advised Irish kings. Biographies of the saint are replete with

stories of druids who "wished to kill holy Patrick."

Pilgrims. On the last Sunday of each July, between 25,000 and 30,000 pilgrims pass the saint's statue and climb to the top of Croagh Patrick, commemorating the saint's fasting there for 40 days and nights. Carbon dating of church ruins at the 2,710-foot summit has shown it dates from Patrick's day, supporting the legend that says Patrick climbed it.

"Daily I expect murder, fraud or captivity," Patrick wrote, "but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven. I have cast myself into the hands of God almighty who rules everywhere."

Indeed, Patrick almost delighted in taking risks for the gospel. "I must take this decision disregarding risks involved and make known the gifts of God and his everlasting consolation. Neither must we fear any such risk in faithfully preaching God's name boldly in every place, so that even after my death, a spiritual legacy may be left for my brethren and my children."

Still, Patrick periodically avoided such confrontations by paying protection money: "Patrick paid the price of 15 souls in gold and silver so that no evil persons should impede them as they traveled straight across the whole of Ireland," wrote one biographer.

Patrick was as fully convinced as the Celts that the power of the druids was real, but he brought news of a stronger power. The famous ***Lorica*** (or "Patrick's Breastplate"—see I Rise Today), a prayer of protection, may not have been written by Patrick (at least in its current form), but it expresses perfectly Patrick's confidence in God to protect him from "every fierce merciless force that may come upon my body and soul; against incantations of false prophets, against black laws of paganism, against false laws of heresy, against deceit of idolatry, against spells of women and smiths and druids."

According to legend, it worked. The King, Loiguire, set up a trap to kill Patrick, but as the bishop came near, all the king could see was a deer. (Thus the Breastplate has also been known as the Deer's Cry.)

There was probably a confrontation between Patrick and the druids, but scholars wonder if it was as dramatic and magical as later stories recounted. One biographer from the late 600s, Muirchœ, described Patrick challenging druids to contests at Tara, in which each party tried to outdo the other in working wonders before the audience:

"The custom was that whoever lit a fire before the king on that night of the year [Easter vigil] would be put to death. Patrick lit the paschal fire before the king on the hill of Slane. The people saw Patrick's fire throughout the plain, and the king ordered 27 chariots to go and seize Patrick . ...

"Seeing that the impious heathen were about to attack him, Patrick rose and said clearly and loudly, 'May God come up to scatter his enemies, and may those who hate him flee from his face.' By this disaster, caused by Patrick's curse in the king's presence because of the king's order, seven times seven men fell. ... And the king, driven by fear, came and bent his knees before the holy man . ...

"[The next day], in a display of magic, a druid invoked demons and brought about a dark fog over the land. Patrick said to the druid, 'Cause the fog to disperse.' But he was unable to do it. Patrick prayed and gave his blessing, and suddenly the fog cleared and the sun shone. ... And through the prayers of Patrick the flames of fire consumed the druid.

"And the king was greatly enraged at Patrick because of the death of his druid. Patrick said to the king, 'If you do not believe now, you will die on the spot for the wrath of God descends on your head.'

"The king summoned his council and said, 'It is better for me to believe than to die.' And he believed as did many others that day."

Yet to Patrick, the greatest enemy was one he had been intimately familiar with—slavery. He was, in fact, the first Christian to speak out strongly against the practice. Scholars agree he is the genuine author of a letter excommunicating a British tyrant, Coroticus, who had carried off some of Patrick's converts into slavery.

"Ravenous wolves have gulped down the Lord's own flock which was flourishing in Ireland," he wrote, "and the whole church cries out and laments for its sons and daughters." He called Coroticus's deed "wicked, so horrible, so unutterable," and told him to repent and to free the converts.

It remains unknown if he was successful in freeing Coroticus's slaves, but within his lifetime (or shortly thereafter), Patrick ended the entire Irish slave trade.

Royal missionary

Patrick concentrated the bulk of his missionary efforts on the country's one hundred or so tribal kings. If the king became a Christian, he reasoned, the people would too. This strategy was a success.

As kings converted, they gave their sons to Patrick in an old Irish custom for educating and "fostering" (Patrick, for his part, held up his end by distributing gifts to these kings). Eventually, the sons and daughters of the Irish were persuaded to become monks and nuns.

From kingdom to kingdom (Ireland did not yet have towns), Patrick worked much the same way. Once he converted a number of pagans, he built a church. One of his new disciples would be ordained as a deacon, priest, or bishop, and left in charge. If the chieftain had been gracious enough to grant a site for a monastery as well as a church, it was built too and functioned as a missionary station.

Before departing, Patrick gave the new converts (or their pastors) a compendium of Christian doctrine and the canons (rules).

Self doubt

Despite his success as a missionary, Patrick was self-conscious, especially about his educational background. "I still blush and fear more than anything to have my lack of learning brought out into the open," he wrote in his ***Confession***. "For I am unable to explain my mind to learned people."

Nevertheless, he gives thanks to God, "who stirred up me, a fool, from the midst of those who are considered wise and learned in the practice of the law as well as persuasive in their speech and in every other way and ahead of these others, inspired me who is so despised by the world."

Over and over again, Patrick wrote that he was not worthy to be a bishop. He wasn't the only one with doubts. At one point, his ecclesiastical elders in Britain sent a deputation to investigate his mission. A number of concerns were brought up, including a rash moment of (unspecified) sin from his youth.

His ***Confession***, in fact, was written in response to this investigation. Reeling from accusations, Patrick drew strength from God: "Indeed he bore me up, though I was trampled underfoot in such a way. For although I was put down and shamed, not too much harm came to me."

If Patrick was not confident about his own shortcomings, he held a deep sense of God's intimate involvement in his life. "I have known God as my authority, for he knows all things even before

they are done," he wrote. "He would frequently forewarn me of many things by his divine response."

Indeed, Patrick recorded eight dreams he regarded as personal messages from God. And scattered throughout his ***Confession*** are tributes to God's goodness to him: "Tirelessly, I thank my God, who kept me faithful on the day I was tried, so that today I might offer to him, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of my soul. He saved me in all dangers and perils . ...So, whatever may come my way, good or bad, I equally tackle it, always giving thanks to God."

According to the Irish annals, Patrick died in 493, when he would have been in his seventies. But we do not know for sure when, where, or how he died. Monasteries at Armagh, Downpatrick, and Saul have all claimed his remains. His feast day is recorded as early as March 17, 797, with the annotation; "The flame of a splendid sun, the apostle of virginal Erin [Ireland], may Patrick with many thousands be the shelter of our wickedness."

Ultimate model

It is difficult to separate fact from fiction in the stories of Patrick's biographers. It is historically clear, however, that Patrick was one of the first great missionaries who brought the gospel beyond the boundaries of Roman civilization. According to tradition, he had established bishops throughout northern, central, and eastern Ireland. Only Munster, in the south, was to remain pagan until a century after Patrick's death.

Patrick was the ultimate model for Celtic Christians. He engaged in continuous prayer. He was enraptured by God and loved sacred Scripture. He also had a rich poetic imagination with the openness to hear God in dreams and visions and a love of nature and the created.

He is, then, most worthy of the appellation ***saint***, as one "set apart" for a divine mission. As such, he became an inspiring example. Hundreds of Celtic monks, in emulation of Patrick, left their homeland to spread the gospel to Scotland, England, and continental Europe.

It is a legacy Patrick was proud of: "For God gave me such grace, that many people through me were reborn to God and afterward confirmed and brought to perfection. And so then a clergy was ordained for them everywhere."

Mary Cagney, a former editorial resident at* Christianity Today*, has written a screenplay titled* A Celtic King*.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 60: How the Irish Were Saved

I Rise Today

The most famous Celtic prayer shows why the Celts are known for exalting both creation and the Creator.

Patrick

I rise today
in the power's strength, invoking the Trinity
believing in threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of creation's Creator.

I rise today
in the power of Christ's birth and baptism,
in the power of his crucifixion and burial,
in the power of his rising and ascending,
in the power of his descending and judging.

I rise today
in the power of the love of cherubim,
in the obedience of angels
and service of archangels,
in hope of rising to receive the reward,
in the prayers of patriarchs,
in the predictions of the prophets,
in the preaching of apostles,
in the faith of confessors,
in the innocence of holy virgins,
in the deeds of the righteous.

I rise today
in heaven's might,
in sun's brightness,
in moon's radiance,
in fire's glory,
in lightning's quickness,
in wind's swiftness,
in sea's depth,
in earth's stability,
in rock's fixity.

I rise today
with the power of God to pilot me,
God's strength to sustain me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look ahead for me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to protect me,

God's way before me,
God's shield to defend me,
God's host to deliver me,
  from snares of devils,
  from evil temptations,
  from nature's failings,
  from all who wish to harm me,
  far or near,
  alone and in a crowd.

Around me I gather today all these powers
against every cruel and merciless force
to attack my body and soul,
against the charms of false prophets,
the black laws of paganism,
the false laws of heretics,
the deceptions of idolatry,
against spells cast by women, smiths, and druids,
and all unlawful knowledge that harms the body and soul.

May Christ protect me today
against poison and burning,
against drowning and wounding,
so that I may have abundant reward;
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me;
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me;
Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising;
Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,
Christ in the eye of all who see me,
Christ in the ear of all who hear me.

I rise today
in power's strength, invoking the Trinity,
believing in threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of creation's Creator.

For to the Lord belongs
salvation,
and to the Lord belongs salvation
and to Christ belongs salvation.
May your salvation, Lord, be with us always.

—"Saint Patrick's Breastplate,"
Old Irish, eighth-century prayer.

Prayer from Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie, Celtic Christian Spirituality: An Anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources ***(SPCK, 1995). Used with permission.***

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Heresy in the Early Church: Christian History Infographic - Sifting Through the Christ Controversies

A quick summary of the competing schools of thought.

the Editors

Many distinctions they made are difficult to translate into English. Still, all parties agreed on one thing: God is impassible, that is, he not subject to change or feelings. But how do you combine this with the Scriptures that imply Christ "became" human and suffered?

In particular, Christians argued passionately about two things:

Is Jesus Divine or Human?

· **Christ Is Fully Divine!**

Most of these people were driven by the conviction that only God can save humankind. Thus they were willing to protect the deity of Christ, even at the expense of his humanity, or in the case of the modalists, at the expense of the Trinity of persons.

Docetists, e.g., Gnostics: The divine Christ would never stoop to touch flesh, which is evil. Jesus only seemed (dokeo, in Greek) human and only appeared to die, for God cannot die. Or, in other versions, "Christ" left "Jesus" before the Crucifixion.
Key text: Phil. 2:8: " ... and [Christ] being found in appearance as a man ... "

Apollinarians: Jesus is not equally human and divine but one person with one nature. In Jesus' human flesh resided a divine mind and will (he didn't have a human mind or spirit), and his divinity controlled or sanctified his humanity.
Key text: John 1:14: "The Word became flesh" [and not a human mind or will].

Modalists, a.k.a. Sabellians: God's names (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) change with his roles or "modes of being" (like a chameleon). When God is the Son, he is not the Father. There is no permanent distinction between the three "persons" of the Trinity, otherwise you have three gods.
Key texts: Ex. 20:3: "You shall have no other gods before me" and John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."

· **Christ May Be Special, But He's Not Divine!**

These people took seriously the Gospels' portrait of Christ, in which Jesus is portrayed very much as a human being.

Ebionites: For these conservative Jewish Christians, God is one, and Jesus must be understood in Old Testament categories. Jesus was merely a specially blessed prophet.
Key text: 1 Tim. 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ."

Adoptionists, a.k.a., dynamic monarchianists: No denying Jesus was special, but what happened is this: at birth (not conception) or baptism, God "adopted" the human Jesus as his special son and gave

him an extra measure of divine power (dynamis, in Greek).
Key text: Luke 3:22 (in some ancient versions): "You are my beloved Son, today I have begotten you."

Arians: The Son as Word, Logos, was created by God before time. He is not eternal or perfect like God, though he was God's agent in creating everything else.
Key text: John 1:14: "The Word [is] the only-begotten of the Father."

How is Jesus Both Divine and Human?

· Christ: One Nature!

Monophysites, e.g., Eutychians: Jesus cannot have two natures; his divinity swallowed up his humanity "like a drop of wine in the sea."
Key text: Col. 1:19: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."

· Christ: Two Persons!

Nestorians: If you dismiss Jesus' humanity like that, he cannot be the Savior of humankind. Better to say he has two natures and also two persons: the divine Christ and the human Christ lived together in Jesus.
Key text: John 2:19: "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days" [i.e., though the human Christ will be destroyed, the divine Christ will continue].

The Orthodox View
Jesus is fully human and fully divine, having two natures in one person—"without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."
Key text: Phil. 2:5–11: "Christ Jesus ... being in very nature God, [was] made in human likeness ... and become obedient to death.... Every tongue [should] confess Jesus Christ is Lord."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

461 The Council of Chalcedon

If Jesus was truly God, how could he be truly human as well? Leo the Great helped guide a critical council to a clear answer.

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Perhaps the best known story about Leo the Great, bishop of Rome from 440 to 461, is his encounter with Attila the Hun in 452. Attila and his army of Huns were marching on Rome. The Roman emperor and senate sought to dissuade him from attacking the city, so they sent an embassy of leading Romans, including Leo, who met Attila and managed to dissuade him from plundering Rome.

This story has acquired legendary accretions that magnify the role of Leo and introduce elements of the supernatural into the story. But what it does convey accurately is the formidable personality of Leo, one of the most imposing of the bishops of Rome. Another of Leo's exploits was his intervention in the Council of Chalcedon.

Knotty Questions

A central theological issue in the first few centuries was the person of Christ: In what sense was he God? At the beginning of the fourth century Arius claimed that only the Father was truly God. In response, the Council of Nicea proclaimed the full deity of Christ. But if Jesus was truly God, how could he be truly human as well? Indeed, was he? If he was, how can one person be both God and man? Was he, in fact, one person? These and other such questions were to dominate Greek theological debate for the next three-and-a-half centuries.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) comes in the middle—not at the end—of these debates. It marks a significant point at which four crucial issues concerning the person of Christ are clarified:

• against Arius, the full deity of Christ is affirmed

• against Apollinarius, the full humanity of Christ is affirmed

• against Nestorius, it is affirmed that Christ is one person

• against Eutyches, it is affirmed that the deity and humanity of Christ remain distinct and are not blurred together.

Chalcedon was occasioned by the teaching of Eutyches, the last of these four heretics. Eutyches was an elderly monk who was theologically out of his depth rather than willfully heretical. He was condemned at Constantinople (now Istanbul) for denying that Christ is fully like us and for blurring together the two natures of Christ, his humanity and divinity.

Leo's *Tome*

Leo wrote a ***Tome***, a theological treatise condemning Eutyches. But the eastern way of settling matters was to convene a general council of bishops. One met in 449, at Ephesus, and took a position different from that of Leo, whose ***Tome*** was not read at the council. Eastern leaders of a like mind to Leo were

deposed. Leo called this gathering a "robber synod" and tried to have it reversed, without success.

The following year the emperor fell from his horse and died. His successor favored the approach of Leo, and so another council was called, which met at Chalcedon (by Constantinople) in 451. Leo did not attend in person, but he sent delegates. This council reversed the decisions of Ephesus and condemned Eutyches. Leo's ***Tome*** was read and approved, though not without some misgivings. Some bishops wanted to stop there, but the emperor insisted upon a confession of faith to unify the empire. Thus was born the Chalcedonian Definition.

The Definition affirmed that Christ is "truly God," "perfect in Godhead," the Son of God who was "begotten of the Father before the ages." Yet he is also "truly man," "perfect in manhood" and was born of the Virgin Mary. The deity and humanity are "not parted or divided into two persons," but Christ is "one person and one being." Nor are his deity and humanity to be blurred together. "The difference of the [divine and human] natures is in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each are preserved." Thus Christ is "made known in two natures [which exist] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

Dynamite-Like Effect

The emperor intended the Definition to unify the empire. Its actual effecet was more like the explosion of dynamite. Large areas of the East would not accept Chalcedon, such as the Coptic churches in Egypt and Ethiopia. The Eastern church was split intotwo, and breakway churches (the "Monophysite," or "One Nature," chruches) formed that exist to this day. Various attempts were made to resolve the conflict, which led to further coundcils in 553 and 880/1. But the Eastern emperor, in Constantinople, faced a fundamental dilemma. He could unite the East by dropping Chalcedon, but at the price of losing communion with the West. Alternatively, he could maintain union with the West by holding to Chalcedon, but at the cost of Eastern unity. Ultimately, the conflict ended because the dissenting churches were in areas that came under Muslim control. Today, however, the two sides are moving closer together.

The Chalcedonian Definition has been subjected to considerable criticism in the last two hundred years. The way in which it expresses itself is certainly not perfect. But its condemnation of the four basic heresies is an abiding and valuable contribution.

The Council's statement remains of considerable relevance since Nestorius's approach is very much alive in modern liberal christologies that speak of Jesus as a man with a special relationship to God rather than as himself being God incarnate. On the other hand, many who pride themselves on holding a conservative view think of Christ as having a single nature that is either divine (the error of Apollinarius) or a blend of the human and the divine (the error of Eutyches).

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Christian History
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

540 Benedict Writes His Monastic Rule

His flexible, compassionate guidelines for Christian community forever shaped monastic life—and influenced Western society.

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We have, therefore, to establish a school of the Lord's service, in the institution of which we hope to order nothing that is harsh or rigorous," wrote Benedict in the prologue to his ***Rule***. ***The Rule of St. Benedict*** is a short document, perhaps thirteen thousand words, yet it has influenced all forms of organized religious life, Protestant and Catholic, in the West.

Reading the Rule

Scholars speculate that Benedict (c. 480–549) wrote the ***Rule*** in the early sixth century (a) as a constitution for his own monastery of Monte Cassino between Rome and Naples; or (b) at the request of other local monastic communities; or © in response to a papal petition for a normative guide for the many groups of monks and nuns throughout Italy and the Christian West.

The ***Rule*** represents the accumulated spiritual wisdom of earlier centuries of monastic experience. It draws upon the teachings of the desert fathers of Egypt, the practice of monastic life in southern Europe, and (especially) the ***Rule of the Master***, a long, highly detailed, and exhortatory document. By classical standards, Benedict was not well educated: his ***Rule*** contains not one reference to an ancient Greek or Latin author. But it displays a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, the writings of the church fathers, and the Egyptian monastic tradition as it came to the West in the ***Institutes*** and ***Conferences*** of John Cassian. Modern scholars stress the major influence of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (and Apocrypha)—the Books of Psalms, Sirach, and Wisdom.

Living the Rule

Benedict's ***Rule*** contains both theoretical principles for the monastic life and practical, everyday directives. Benedict legislated for a community of laymen governed benevolently by an abbot—a community whose purpose was the glorification of God and the salvation of the individual monk. After a year's novitiate or probation, a monk professed three vows: stability, the reformation of the monk's life, and obedience. Benedictine life meant a routine done in a spirit of silence, dedicated to prayer and work, and characterized by moderation and flexibility in all things. This flexibility, and what St. Gregory the Great called the ***Rule's*** "discretion," both distinguish the Benedictine from earlier, more austere forms of monastic life, and help explain the ***Rule's*** widespread adoption. For example, discussing food and drink, Benedict wrote (ch. 40): "Although we read that wine is not a proper drink for monks, yet, since in our own day they cannot be persuaded of this, let us at least agree not to drink to excess, but sparingly, 'because wine makes even the wise fall away' (Ecclesiasticus 19:2)."

Benedict intended that the monk's day be centered around liturgy, the ***Opus Dei*** (Work of God) "to which nothing ought to be preferred" (ch. 46). The liturgical code consisted of the night office (vigils or matins) and the seven day offices (lauds, prime, tierce, sext, none, vespers, and complin), as advised in Psalm 119:147, 164. At each office the monks recited psalms with refrains, and versicles, punctuated by silent prayer, a hymn, and readings from the Scriptures and from patristic commentaries on those Scriptures. In Benedict's day the practice was to recite the entire 150 psalms within a week's time.

St. Benedict planned the monastery as a self-sufficient socio-economic unit "so constructed that within it all the necessities, such as water, mill, and garden are contained and the various crafts are practiced. Then there will be no need for the monks to roam outside, because that is not at all good for their souls" (ch. 66). Having stated that "Idleness is the enemy of the soul; therefore, the brethren should be occupied at stated times in manual labor, and at other fixed times in sacred writing" (ch. 48), the ***Rule*** prescribes that all monks in good health should spend part of the day in manual work. Here Benedict made a profound contribution to the concept of the dignity of labor. The ancient world considered manual labor demeaning and idealized the life of leisure. The free man, the gentleman, did not work with his hands. Benedict implied that manual labor, even apart from its economic import, was physically and psychologically healthful, that work was a worthy occupation.

Benedict called his monastery "a school of the Lord's service," and he used the word "school" in both a spiritual and an intellectual sense. In the monastery the monk learned to serve the Lord, slowly crushing his faults and sins and adoring the Almighty in worship. To praise the Lord in the ***Opus Dei***, however, the monk had to learn to read. From Benedict's entirely spiritual conception, there gradually evolved schools within monasteries whose practical purpose was the education of young monks and the children of the local nobility. Between about 600 and 1000, the period that John Henry Newman called "the Benedictine centuries," monastic schools provided much of the training available in Western Europe. Books are a necessity for any school, and the preparation of books and manuscripts became a distinctly monastic craft. Contrary to the popular modern view, however, most medieval monks were not involved in copying manuscripts. Aside from the obvious fact that many kinds of work are required for the operation of a large (or small) establishment, few people in any age have the inclination or discipline for long periods of literary and intellectual work.

Understanding the Rule

Benedict considered his ***Rule*** a guide for ordinary men and women, not saints or mystics or intellectuals. The ***Rule*** implies that the newcomer to the monastery has had no previous ascetic experience nor even a particularly strong bent to the religious life. In his advice to the abbot—"Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery.... Let not one of noble birth be put before him who was formerly a slave" (ch. 2)—Benedict anticipated the entrance of persons of all social classes. His advice to the monks—"Let them bear with the greatest patience one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character" (ch. 72)—clearly anticipated very different (and perhaps difficult) personality types within the community. And, again, in his recommendation to the abbot—"Let him always exalt mercy above judgment ... let him keep his own frailty before his eyes and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken" (ch. 64)—Benedict urged compassionate, not dictatorial, government.

What accounts for the ***Rule's*** profound influence on Western culture? The ***Rule's*** compassion for weakness and failure while it sets forth high ideals; its flexibility and adaptability; its monarchal government but respect for individual freedom; and its proverbial discretion.

The enduring legacy of the ***Rule of St. Benedict*** to the modern world is a tradition of ordered and disciplined living, a deep appreciation for the ancient liturgy, the wisdom of a rich literary culture, a respect for the dignity of labor, and a compassionate understanding of the human condition.

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Gregory the Great
"Servant of the Servants of God"

"Act in such a way that your humility may not be weakness, nor your authority be severity. Justice must be accompanied by humility, that humility may render justice lovable."

Gregory, before he became pope, happened to see some Anglo-Saxon slaves for sale in a Roman marketplace. He asked about the race of the remarkable blond men and was told they were "Anglos." "Not Anglos, but angels," he was said to reply. As a result, it is said, Gregory was later inspired to send missionaries to England.

Though apocryphal, the story shows a devout Gregory concerned about the spread of Christian faith. But this was but one facet of Gregory's extraordinary talent and energies.

Noble beginning

Gregory was descended from Roman nobles with a strong legacy of Christian faith. He was related to two previous popes (Felix III and Agapitus I), his aunts were nuns, and his parents joined cloisters in their later years. He was raised in Rome when it was only a shell of its former glory.

By the age of 30, he was the chief administrative official of the city, responsible for finances, police, provisioning, and public works—an experience that helped him hone his administrative skills and, together with his personal wecaptionh, gave him the opportunity to create six monasteries.

Yet Gregory remained dissatisfied, and upon his father's death in 574, he converted his house into a monastery and retired to a life of contemplation and prayer. During these years, the happiest in Gregory's life, he began a detailed study of the Scriptures. Here he also ruined his health with fasting, a sacrifice that would precipitate his early death.

Called again to service

His administrative skills did not remain unappreciated. In 577 Pope Benedict appointed Gregory one of the seven deacons of Rome, and Pope Pelagius II sent him to Constantinople in 578 as representative to the imperial court, then later recalled him to serve as his confidential adviser.

In 589 a flood destroyed the grain reserves of Rome, instigating a famine and then a plague that swept through Rome and killed Pope Pelagius. Gregory was elected to succeed him. Though he had tried to refuse the office, once elected, he went to work with vigor.

To deal with the famine, Gregory instituted a city-wide penance, fed people from the church's granaries, and organized systematic relief for the poor.

Gregory then set himself reforming the church. He removed high officials "for pride and misdeeds," enforced celibacy, replaced lay officers with monks, and initiated a reorganization of "the patrimony of Peter," the vast land holdings of the church. The efficient and humane management of these estates brought in the revenue necessary to run the church as well as perform tasks the imperial government was neglecting.

An attack by the Lombard invaders in 592 and the inaction of the imperial representative forced Gregory to negotiate an end to the siege of Rome. When the imperial representative broke the truce in 593, Gregory purchased a separate peace treaty with tributes from the church coffers. By this time in Roman history, the pope had become the unofficial civil ruler of Italy, appointing generals, arranging relief, rallying cities to the defense, and paying the salaries of soldiers.

Pastoral care

Gregory also was actively concerned about the work of priests. He wrote a book of instruction for bishops, On Pastoral Care, in which he wrote, "Act in such a way that your humility may not be weakness, nor your authority be severity. Justice must be accompanied by humility, that humility may render justice lovable." It became a manual for holy life throughout the Middle Ages.

Gregory believed preaching was one of the clergy's primary duties, and he conducted a preaching tour of area churches. His Homilies on the Gospels was published in 591 and widely used for hundreds of years.

In 593 Gregory published his Dialogues, a history of the lives of Italian saints, as well as his sermons on Ezekiel and the Song of Songs. In 595 he published his allegorical exposition on Job, Moralia, and made changes to the liturgy. His interest in church music has been honored, as well: his name has been given to the plainsong ("Gregorian chant") that developed over the next few hundred years.

His frequent correspondence across the world shows him well aware of evangelistic opportunities in Britain. So it is not surprising that in 596 he sent Augustine of Canterbury (not Augustine the Church Father who lived two centuries earlier), along with 40 monks, on a mission to "this far corner of the world."

Diverse legacy

Gregory set a high mark for the medieval papacy. He defended the primacy of the chair of Peter against even the smallest slight. He reconciled many independent bishops to Rome by humble appeals, not defending his personal rights but those of the institution. He was the first pope to call himself *Servus Servorum Dei*, "the servant of the servants of God," a title still in use today.

The administrative framework he set in place for the management of church lands made possible the development of the Papal States. His encouragement of the monastic life,

his friendship with the kings of Spain and Gaul, and his deferential yet independent relationship with the emperor set a pattern for church-state relations for centuries.

He is one of the four great Latin doctors of the church (along with Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome), and upon his death he was named a saint by popular acclaim.

http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/131christians/rulers/gregory.html

Christianity and Slavery
By David Feddes

Two thousand years ago, over half the people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Then along came somebody who told his followers, "You have only one Master and you are all brothers." The man who said this didn't start a slave revolt. He didn't change society overnight. But Jesus was good news for slaves.

Wherever Jesus' influence spread, the lowly were lifted up and the institution of slavery was weakened. Jesus has been a world changer in many ways, and this is surely true in the area of freedom and dignity. Millions of people who now enjoy freedom might still be slaves if not for Christ's impact on the world. Slavery was ingrained in the cultures of Europe, Asia, Africa, among natives in North and South America—just about everywhere on Earth. But in culture after culture, slavery wilted and shriveled away when the gospel of Christ took root and grew.

Not everyone who claimed to follow Jesus took his message to heart. Some tried to defend slavery in God's name and insisted on their own superiority over others, rather than regarding them as members of the same family in Christ. But wherever Jesus' followers faithfully regarded Jesus as their only true Master and each other as brothers and sisters, things changed. Slaves no longer saw themselves as nobodies, and slave owners no longer saw their slaves as property. When slaves gained true human dignity in their own eyes and in the eyes of their masters, the entire relationship of master and slave was sure to change, and the acceptability of slavery was sure to fade.

The apostle Paul was one of the earliest, most effective messengers for Jesus. In city after city, Paul preached the gospel of eternal life through Christ, and Paul wrote letters under Christ's direction that are a big part of the Bible. One of Paul's letters was written to Philemon, a man Paul had led to faith in Jesus. Philemon had owned a slave, Onesimus. This slave stole from Philemon and ran off to another city. There Onesimus met Paul and became a Christian. Paul loved him like a son but sent him back to his master, Philemon, whom Paul also loved. Paul sent Philemon a letter of advice about what to do with Onesimus.

In the Roman Empire, a runaway slave could be punished with death. But that would not happen to this runaway. Paul told Philemon to accept his former slave back "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord" (Philemon 16). Philemon took Paul's advice and preserved the letter so that others could read it as part of the Word of God and experience its impact. Paul's advice to see someone not as a slave but as a dear brother echoed Jesus' principle, "You have only one Master and you are all brothers."

Did Paul Support Slavery?

People sometimes charge that the Bible, especially Paul's letters, supported slavery and oppression. After all, in two of Paul's letters to churches, he wrote, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters" (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22). Many church members were slaves and needed God's guidance on how to deal with their situation. What if Paul had told them to rebel or run away? What would have happened? Countless Christian slaves would have been killed, and the Roman Empire would have persecuted

Christians more fiercely than ever. So rather than trying to abolish slavery on the spot, Paul told slaves to obey.

Does that mean Paul supported slavery? Not at all. He spoke of "slave traders" as "ungodly and sinful" (1 Timothy 1:9-10). He told slaves, "If you can gain your freedom, do so" (1 Corinthians 7:21). If slaves were offered freedom, they should accept, and if they could buy their freedom, they should do it.

Meanwhile, those who remained in slavery were instructed to do their work well, not just to please their earthly masters but to please Christ. Work "like slaves of Christ," Paul said, "because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free" (Ephesians 6:6, 8).

Slaves weren't the only ones Paul instructed. He also addressed masters who had become Christians. He told them not to threaten slaves (Ephesians 6:9). Instead, Paul ordered, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4:1). Now, what would happen if Christian masters regarded slaves as brothers instead of property? What would happen if masters paid fair wages and did not threaten slaves or force them to be employed against their will? The bondage would no longer exist. And that's what happened as the Spirit of Christ worked in people's lives.

But what about Christian slaves with non-Christian masters? Should they feel sorry for themselves and hate their masters? No, Paul taught them to care more about the salvation of their masters than about their own slavery. It would be far worse for a non-Christian master to suffer in hell forever than for a Christian slave to endure a few bad years. Christian slaves, said Paul, should be cooperative and "show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:9-10). The main concern was not just social and political equality but to lead people to salvation and make them brothers and sisters in God's family.

Paul urged Christian slaves to focus more on the privilege of belonging to Christ than on the problem of being in slavery.

> "Were you a slave when you were called?" said Paul. "Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." (1 Corinthians 7:21-24).

Anyone bought by Jesus' blood and treasured by God could not think of himself as merely a slave and a nobody. He wasn't just somebody's slave; he was a child of the King of the universe. Paul himself was often mistreated and spent a lot of time in prison for his faith, but even in chains he lived in the freedom of Christ, and he wanted others to have this same Christian freedom, even in hard situations.

In those first decades after Christ's coming, economic, social, and racial status counted for very little in the church. What counted most was being loved by God and adopted as his children. As Paul put it, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither ... slave nor free ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus..." (Galatians 3:28). "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether ... slave or free" (1 Corinthians 12:13). These weren't just Paul's own thoughts. They were revealed by God

and mirrored the mind of Christ. Jesus didn't overthrow institutions with violence; he transformed relationships with truth and love

Greatness in Serving

By faith in Jesus, a slave could become a prince in God's kingdom. Even if the world around him treated him as a slave, he knew himself to be much more than that. The Bible says, "The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position" (James 1:9). The honor of being God's child and a citizen of heaven gave joy and dignity to even the lowliest slave. As the church grew, the Christian brotherhood and respect for people of every social class had a transforming effect not just on individuals but on entire civilizations.

In classical culture during the early years of Christianity, more than half the people were slaves, and the upper class people of the Roman Empire looked down on the slaves. Politicians and intellectuals thought along the lines of the famous philosopher Aristotle, who said that slavery was good because "the master gained a worker, and the slave came under the guidance of a superior, reasonable being." According to Aristotle, "a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave. Therefore there can be no friendship with a slave as a slave."

The Christian church was different. Masters who became Christians were taught to see their slaves as dear brothers. Slaves were loved and treasured as valuable members of the church. Slaves worshiped beside nobles. Slaves received the same baptism as the rich. Slaves ate at the same table of the Lord's Supper as the powerful. Some who were slaves in society became leaders in the church. One former slave, Callistus, even became bishop of Rome. The church, whenever it was faithful to Jesus, was loving, liberating, and uplifting for people no matter what level of society they came from.

What a contrast between the church and the culture around it! No wonder so many slaves were attracted to Christ and to his church. And still today, any factory worker or farmhand or burger flipper or cubicle dweller who feels like a slave or a nobody finds out that in the church of Jesus Christ everybody matters.

Jesus taught that there's no greatness in being bossy and looking down on others, and there's no shame in working hard to serve others. Jesus defined the difference between the class-conscious world and the Christian attitude when he said,

> "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus taught that a slave whose work accomplished something useful was greater than a proud, spoiled ruler who did nothing but order others around. Jesus set the pattern not just by his words but by his example. Though he was king of heaven, he made himself a servant to the needs of people who needed salvation. If the Lord of the universe could serve so humbly, his followers could see humble service as a glorious thing.

Setting Slaves Free

As more and more people became Christians and accepted this mindset, slaves gained status and dignity in the church, and many wealthy Christians freed their slaves. When Jesus taught, "You have only one Master and you are all brothers," and when he taught the Golden Rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12), Jesus planted the seeds for setting slaves free. When a slave owner became a Christian, learned the Golden Rule, and regarded others as brothers, how could he keep slaves in bondage against their will? Historians point out that in the second and third century after Jesus' coming, the act of setting slaves free was more frequent in urban households led by Christians than anywhere else. The official act of liberation usually took place in church with a bishop looking on.

John Chrysostom was the world's foremost Christian preacher in the mid-300's. By that time Christianity was so widespread that some people went to church even if they weren't truly devoted to Christ. Among the churchgoers were upper-class people who owned huge numbers of slaves. Some said slavery was necessary for society and good for the slaves themselves. Chrysostom fired back that it was pride and selfishness, not concern for humanity, that moved them to have slaves. They were too proud to do honest work and too proud to see all people as their equals before God.

Chrysostom pointed out that God gave us hands and feet so that we could do our own work without making servants do it all for us. He said that if God wanted people to have slaves, he would have created a slave for Adam. Slavery came into the world as an accursed effect of sin, said Chrysostom, "but when Christ came, He put an end also to this." Chrysostom insisted that slaves should never be whipped or put in chains. In fact, he said there was really only one way to own slaves in a Christian way. "Buy a slave," said Chrysostom, "train him in a skill to earn his own living, and then set him free."

Around the year 400, a British teenager named Patricius was captured by pirates and sold as a slave to the pagan chief of an Irish tribe. It was one of the great turning points in history. After six years of slavery, Patricius gained his freedom. He could have stayed in Britain, but the young man was so devoted to Christ and cared so much about the land that had enslaved him that he returned to Ireland as a missionary. There Patricius led thousands of Irish people to Christ and became known to history as St. Patrick. Having once been a slave himself, Patrick condemned all forms of slavery and taught the new Irish Christians to set slaves free.

Not all Christians and church officials set slaves free. Some still had slaves and defended slavery. Their thinking was shaped more by the world than by God's Word. But the biblical principle of seeing people not as slaves but as brothers had an effect that kept growing. Professor Alvin Schmidt writes, "For several centuries bishops and councils recommended the redemption of captive slaves, and for five centuries the Trinitarian monks redeemed Christian slaves from Moorish servitude. By the twelfth century slaves in Europe were rare, and by the fourteenth century slavery was almost unknown on the Continent."

Slavery Revived and Abolished

Sad to say, societies influenced by Christianity sometimes fall backward and squander the gains of Christian civilization. For instance, abortion and killing of

newborns were common in the Roman Empire and then faded under the influence of Christianity, only to reappear centuries later when people abandoned Christian teaching for pagan practices. In a similar way, slavery faded under Christianity's influence, then made a comeback centuries later when powerful people put finances ahead of Christ. In the 1600s the powers of Europe decided that their colonies could prosper by using slaves, most of them obtained in Africa.

Now, enslavement was nothing new for Africans. Most African societies had slaves and even regarded slaves as a unit of money. Yale scholar Lamin Sanneh was born in West Africa and is an expert on the history of slavery in Africa. He says that slavery "was part and parcel of the African value system." The buying and selling of tribal slaves attracted merchants from the Arab world, and Arab Muslims had a booming slave trade in Africa for at least 700 years before Europeans decided they could profit from it. Most Africans slaves were sold into slavery by their fellow Africans. Over four million African slaves were exported to Islamic countries even before America was discovered.

The enslavement of Africans was not started by Europe and its American colonies, but they got into the business, and their responsibility is especially heavy because they should have known better. They had the gospel and the heritage of centuries in which slavery had almost vanished under Christian influence. Many Europeans and Americans got into the African slave trade simply because there was money to be made.

But there were always Christians who resisted this. "Christ died for all," said Quaker Christian George Fox, "for the blacks as much as for you that are called whites." George Whitefield, the greatest American preacher of the 1700s (and perhaps any era) told whites to think of slave children as equal to their own. "Think your children are in any way better by nature than poor Negroes? No! In no way!" thundered Whitefield. In 1774, evangelist John Wesley thundered against the slave traders, "Do you never feel another person's pain? Have you no sympathy?" That was Wesley's way of applying Jesus' statement, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

In 1787, a small group of Christians began a public campaign against British involvement in the African slave trade. William Wilberforce, a devout follower of Jesus and a talented member of parliament, led the effort, and a few decades later, Britain at last outlawed the slave trade in all British territories.

Many politicians and business leaders fought fiercely to keep the slave trade going. One objection was that opposition to slavery was motivated by religion. "Things have come to a pretty pass," griped Lord Melbourne, "when religion is allowed to invade public life." In America, a pro-slavery congressman had a similar complaint about mixing religion and politics, snarling that Christians claimed to understand human rights better than the rest of the world. Today we hear similar complaints against Christians who value unborn babies and oppose abortion, human cloning, and destruction of embryos for research. "Don't mix religion and politics"--that's a frequent refrain among people who ignore the Bible and Christian history in order to treat fellow humans as property instead of as people.

In any case, Christianity was too strong in England and in America for slavery to prevail. In England, the slave trade was outlawed, and by the mid-1800s the anti-slavery movement in America was growing strong, often led by Christian preachers and

Christian authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Slavery would probably have ended eventually in America, even without the Civil War, but that conflict brought American slavery to a decisive end.

Slave Power

Meanwhile, as white people in Britain and the United States argued over slavery, what were the slaves themselves doing? Many were becoming Christians. They heard biblical truths about freedom, dignity, loosing chains of oppression, and being God's children, and they found comfort and courage. Sojourner Truth spoke of the sorrow of slavery and the comfort of Christ when she said, "I have borne thirteen children and seem 'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard." Their masters might treat them as inferior, but the Word of God told them that all men are equal in Christ. Many slaves believed truth of God, not the falsehood of their masters. Faith in Christ comforted the distressed, and church life provided a setting where slaves used talents and leadership skills, which they would go on to apply in other areas of life beyond the church. They became people of strength and dignity, and nothing empowered them more than their churches and the good news of new life in Jesus Christ.

And how did Africa itself start moving beyond slavery? Professor Lamin Sanneh tells the gripping story of what happened in the 1800s after some former American slaves went back to the land of their roots and brought Christianity to many who were still slaves in Africa. Earlier mission efforts in Africa had focused on a top-down approach of converting the chiefs in order to Christianize the rest of the tribe. But the former slaves worked from the bottom up, teaching slaves and former slaves in various African nations about Christ. They showed them the Christian structure for families. They empowered the people at the bottom level of society by educational efforts and societies to help the poor. As a result, slavery became less common in Africa.

Before that, says Dr. Sanneh, slavery was ingrained in African society. Nothing could change it—except the "moral crisis" which came about as the former slaves taught others the dignity of every individual before God. In the words of Sanneh, "African captives themselves took to this kind of religion with gusto. They embraced it. You can see why: in their own societies, once a slave always a slave. You always carried with you this stigma. This doctrine said that the stigma is dissolved in the blood of Christ." Once again Bible's words were confirmed: "There is neither slave nor free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In more recent times, slavery was revived for a time in nations that idolized government instead of following Christ. Nazi concentration camps and communist labor camps enslaved millions. Even today in some parts of the world, people work under harsh conditions for barely enough pay to buy food. Some brutal rulers allow their own forces to enslave their enemies. And still today, Christ reveals a better way, and Christians are in the vanguard of respect and freedom for all people.

The world changer, Jesus Christ, once said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Jesus was talking first of all about being freed from slavery to sin. Do you trust Jesus as your Savior and repent of your sins? That's what we all need most of all: liberation from the guilt, shame, and

bondage of the evil within us, and freedom to live in the joy of forgiveness and eternal life. And that's not all. When Christ sets individuals free from sin, the impact ripples throughout entire societies and nations. Wherever people trust in Jesus for and take to heart his words, "You have only one Master and you are all brothers," slavery shrivels and discrimination dies.