

Key Figures of Fifth Century Christianity

Church History

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CHURCH AGES

The Early Church AD33-590

AD33-100 The First Century Church

AD100-300 The Patristic Age (Early Fathers)

AD300-590 The Imperial Church

The Medieval Church AD590-1517

The Reformed Church AD1517-1800

The Modern Church 1800-present

REVIEW

? How has the church changed from our study of the first century church until now?

? What were some of the agents of that change?

5th Century Europe is in shambles. The Western empire is in shambles and really has no power to control the civil unrest. The East is more stable, but have their own issues to deal with. It seems that every barbarian warlord sets his face toward Rome in the hopes that he might become the next Emperor.

The instability makes an impact on the church in a couple of significant ways. It accounts for the advance of the Gospel as hadn't really been seen since the early years. The instability also affords the church a power never before held as the Church becomes the stabilizing factor amidst so much civil unrest.

We have already looked at Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria who were at the center of the biggest theological issue of the century, the nature of

Christ's person. There are two other figures whom we must address.

PATRICK

Patrick was born sometime around 385BC to a Roman Christian family in Great Britain. We know of his life primarily from his autobiography "Confessions." That writing gives a great summary of Patrick's work, but without much specificity regarding time and place. His birthplace may have been toward the north of England.

His father, Calpornius, was a town leader and a deacon in the church. His grandfather, Potitus, had been a pastor, but Patrick was not a follower of Christ. At the age of 16, Irish pirates attacked England and carried away thousands of people including Patrick who was sold into slavery. Patrick made a direct connection between his lack of faith and his slavery.

We deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments. We would not listen to our priests, who advised us about how we could be saved. The Lord brought his strong anger upon us, and scattered us among many nations even to the ends of the earth. It was among foreigners that it was seen how little I was.

? Can you see a correlation between Patrick's captivity and the happenings in the rest of the empire at this time?

During his captivity, Patrick was humbled.

It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late, I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance.

It is interesting throughout *the confession* how Patrick expresses an Augustinian understanding of salvation.

? Why might this be significant? Who was Augustine's adversary? Where was he from?

Patrick served an Irish chieftain as shepherd for 6 years. He prayed constantly day and night often waking early to do so. As he did so, his "love for God increased, and his sense of awe before Him. Faith grew and [his] spirit was moved..."

There is a lot of mysticism surrounding the character of Patrick. You may have heard the story of how he cast all the snakes out of Ireland or how he used a shamrock to explain the Trinity. These are almost certainly false. However, there are three extraordinary events we need to know because Patrick himself claims them.

1. A Vision During Captivity

It was while Patrick was enslaved that one night he had a dream or a vision telling him that he would be set free.

It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: "You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country." Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: "Look – your ship is ready."

The ship was actually 200 miles away. He arranged passage and the ship. They sailed for 3 days before landing in a deserted spot on the coast of England.

2. The Answered Prayer For Food

Having made it safely to shore, Patrick and the ship's crew wandered about for 28 days, not finding any food in the wilderness. They asked Patrick to pray for their provision. He told them to

"turn in faith with all your hearts to the Lord my God for nothing is impossible with Him-so that He may put food in your way..."

And that is apparently what God did. Suddenly, a herd of pigs appeared in their path that sustained them for a number of days. They also found wild honey. "On the very night we ran out of food, we met people."

Patrick returned to his family who pleaded with him to never leave again. Several years later, Patrick had another dream.

3. The Vision of Victorinus

[Victorinus] gave me one of these [letters], and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the Irish people. While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us."

Patrick went first to Europe to study, probably in Gaul at a monastery, perhaps at Auxerre. From there he returned to Ireland. Patrick faced many challenges in his mission. Not everyone was welcoming. The Druids opposed him. The Irish were a rough people.

As Patrick persisted in his ministry, he was able to baptize thousands. Many wealthy women came to faith in Christ. Eventually, he won many chieftains to Christ. He was able to appoint clergy over which he became bishop.

There is a lot of speculation over scant evidence for many of Patrick's activities. At one point, he apparently excommunicated a leader, either an Irish Chief or a Roman noble for enslaving natives. This may have been the impetus for charges brought against Patrick requiring him to write a confession and defense of his work.

? How did Patrick's life make a difference?

LEO I 400-461

Leo was a Roman Aristocrat and the first Roman Bishop to be called Great. He was an able politician and a dedicated bishop. His life is most noteworthy for three events.

1. Helping Define the Nature of Christ

2. Meeting with Attila the Hun

3. Advancing the supremacy of Rome in western Christianity.

Leo's Christmas Day Sermon

Our Saviour, dearly-beloved, was born today: let us be glad. For there is no proper place for sadness, when we keep the birthday of the Life, which destroys the fear of mortality and brings to us the joy of promised eternity. No one is kept from sharing in this happiness. There is for all one common measure of joy, because as our Lord the destroyer of sin and death finds none free from charge, so is He come to free us all. Let the saint exult in that he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad in that he is invited to pardon. Let the gentile take courage in that he is called to life...

Let us put off then the old man with his deeds: and having obtained a share in the birth of Christ let us renounce the

works of the flesh. Christian, acknowledge thy dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which thou art a member. Recollect that thou wert rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God's light and kingdom. By the mystery of Baptism thou wert made the temple of the Holy Ghost: do not put such a denizen to flight from thee by base acts, and subject thyself once more to the devil's thralldom: because thy purchase money is the blood of Christ, because He shall judge thee in truth Who ransomed thee in mercy, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reigns for ever and ever. Amen.[23]

Notable in Patrick's writings is that regardless of his distance from the center of Christianity, his theology is in keeping with the soundest of churches in the empire. Notable in Leo's writings, and the reason he shouldn't be called a pope in the modern sense, is that salvation is still a work of God completely on a sinner who is saved and sure of his salvation.

St. Patrick's Breastplate

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,

Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,

Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,

Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today

Through the strength of the love of cherubim,

In the obedience of angels,

In the service of archangels,

In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,

In the prayers of patriarchs,

In the predictions of prophets,

In the preaching of apostles,

In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.
I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.
I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.
I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body
and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of
reward.
Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,

Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the
Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.