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For my father,
and in loving memory
of my mother
(August 6, 1927–November 8, 2001)

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Preface

Bill Cosby recounts the following conversation between himself and a boy named Arthur:

> "Tell me, Arthur, how would you change history?"
> "I would leave out that part that's taught in school," he replied.
> "Then I'm afraid that not much would have happened."
> "That's okay. Too much stuff happened anyway."

Arthur expressed the key issue with which I struggled in writing this book. Too much stuff did happen. In order to deal with this problem I have had to be very selective in what I discussed. As a result, you will not find here a general or broad overview to the history of the church. Instead you will find selections from church history that I believe to be particularly important to evangelical Christianity in the twenty-first century. This is a church history meant to help frame Christian emphases in the present day. The choices, of course, involve personal viewpoints, but they are informed by several years of teaching church history to evangelicals in a seminary setting. I do not pretend that the selections will go unchallenged. My goal is to nurture Christian virtues—faith, hope and love—through historical perspective. By demonstrating Christian vitality and weakness in each age, I hope to bring sober reflection upon our own expressions of Christianity. By introducing some major paradigms and issues, I intend

to provide a succinct summary that will energize further reading and study. I hope to convince the reader that history aids spirituality. For helpful, one-volume introductions to fill in the gaps of this book, you may want to read *Christianity Through the Centuries* by Earle Cairns, *Turning Points* by Mark Noll, *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley, and *Exploring Church History* by Howard Vos.

Not everyone will agree with my selections, and some may be disappointed in a gap I did not fill. To those readers I apologize. And that reminds me of something Will Rogers said about history and historians: "History ain't what it is; it's what some writer wanted it to be."

Every historian is an interpreter of historical facts, presenting those facts as he or she understands them. The historian attempts to find some meaning or significance in what has happened in the past and to describe a relationship between this person and another, between this event and that one. Historians try to make connections and, out of those connections, to suggest lessons. This book presents what I believe to be the *significance* of several events and persons, not just a collection of facts and dates. Christians need to be helped by history, not burdened with all that "stuff that happened." To this end, at times I indicate continuity that historical beliefs and practices had with Scripture. In many ways church history is the history of Christians interpreting the Bible. That interpretation shows itself in a variety of ways, from commentaries to liturgy and

from the practice of discipleship to the production of conciliar creeds. Furthermore, occasionally I will mention ways in which contemporary Christian writers evidence commonality with their historical relatives. Significance is highlighted through continuity.

That brings me back to Bill Cosby. The comedian said, “Another young scholar, a girl of seven, was equally enlightening when I discussed history with her. ‘Do you happen to know what Labor Day is?’ I asked her. ‘Labor Day is the day when everything is on sale,’ she said.” Yes, we are after the significance of dates, people and events—but not just any significance. We want to see the significance for Christian perspective in the new century.

So, what in history may be of particular use to Christians of the twenty-first century? Let me suggest three things.

First, history can help us put our own experience, knowledge and practice into proper perspective. Each generation is tempted to view itself as the best, brightest and most insightful generation. Each generation of Christians is tempted to see its way of worship, its way of ministry, its way of doing spirituality as the most biblical or practical. History reminds us that our generation is not the only one that has ever lived the Christian life. We are Christians within a company of Christians, both present and past, both living on earth and with the Lord. History helps keep us from becoming infatuated with ourselves. History nurtures the godly virtue of humility.

Second, history reminds us that actions and ideas have consequences not only in our own generation but also for generations to come. What we believe, teach and practice affects future generations of believers. Therefore history helps us to not act or teach impulsively. We must employ caution. We must enter into self-criticism and self-evaluation. History helps keep us from taking ourselves too seriously, as if we had all the best answers. At the same time history helps us take ourselves very seriously, because we affect others.

Third, history can give us new ideas, new ways of thinking, new examples of practice that may be biblical. Because these treasures of life and faith are old, because they have been locked away in that dusty old chest of history, when we finally open it up and take them out, they seem new. Wise Christians should always be historians in one sense. They sit higher and can see further, more panoramically, if they enrich themselves from the past. John of Salisbury (1115−1180), a medieval scholar, spoke of the jewels, the riches, the prestige of antiquity. He was right. The past has bequeathed to us its gems. Note his wise words:

> Our own generation enjoys the legacy bequeathed to it by that which preceded it. We frequently know more, not because we have moved ahead by our own natural ability, but because we are supported by the [mental] strength of others, and possess riches that we have inherited from our forefathers. Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to [puny] dwarfs

> perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.

Our brothers and sisters from the past, indwelt by the same Spirit who indwells us, have left us a rich inheritance. It's locked away inside a treasure chest. It's layered in cobwebs. It's rusty and in some ways not very appealing. But inside is the wealth John of Salisbury told us about: diamonds, emeralds, gold sovereigns and chains of Spanish silver. If you have ever wanted to go on a treasure hunt, you've come to the right place. We've already found the chest. The hard, laborious work is done. All we need do is dip our hands inside and let the riches run through our fingers. Come along, and you'll be sitting higher and seeing further.

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Part 1

Diamonds
The Early Church

There I was in the catacombs outside Rome. I was thrilled, curious and fully attentive to what the guide was saying. Never mind that in my haste to get inside I had accidentally joined a German group with a German-speaking guide. These sites of ancient Christian burial held my eye captive. I'm sure my mouth hung open. I stared. I got chilled although I was wearing a coat.

This was the second burial site I had visited in as many days. The day before, I had taken a train south to Anzio, Italy, to the American cemetery where the fallen brave of World War II were buried. I had visited the museum of the great amphibious landing of January 1944, and I had walked what I thought was the invasion beach. Gazing out to sea and then back to the city, I tried to envision the ships, the landing craft and the troops. Now here I was walking below ground at the very place where some of my earliest brothers and sisters in Christ rested, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. After all, as our guide reminded us, their bodies, even in death, are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Their loved ones had left artwork and inscriptions symbolic of their faith. Here slept Christians who even in death had

a living hope. Sharing with their Lord the scorn of death, for them too the tomb was merely temporary.

My favorite figure in this early Christian art is that of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is shown as a young man wearing a short tunic that hangs over his left shoulder and down to his knees. On his back he carries a lamb with his hand or arms wrapped firmly around the front and back legs. The symbolism is obvious: the Savior mercifully and securely saves the soul that was lost (Lk 15:3–7; Jn 10:1–16).

In a fourth-century fresco the Shepherd stands in a garden, surrounded by sheep that are refreshed by luscious, green grasses and by two men who soothe their parched throats in clear, blue waterfalls. Here are souls, rescued by the Savior, in paradise. The lovely scene evokes in the viewer's mind the words of Isaiah 49:9–10:

> They will feed beside the roads
> and find pasture on every barren hill.
> They will neither hunger nor thirst.…
> He who has compassion on them will guide them
> and lead them beside springs of water.

Of all the early inscriptions, I find my heart drawn most to the one that marked the grave of Damasus, bishop of Rome (366−384):

> He who trod the tumultuous waves,
> He who restores life to the seeds
> which die in the earth,
> He who could unloosen the lethal bonds of death

after darkness,
and restore life after three days
to Martha's brother,
will, I believe, make Damasus rise from his ashes.

Here was the faith of the early church. I left the catacombs humbled, taught and inspired. But in this underground cemetery next to the Appian Way I had only just scratched the surface of the riches of the early church. There was—and is—so much more.

In part one of this book we see what some elements of leadership and Christian life looked like in the church from the close of the New Testament through the fifth century. One of the themes that continually shows itself is that Christians of the early church had to be doctrinally minded; they had to be astute theologically. Some other themes, equally important, are

- the emphasis on the corporate unity of the church rather than on individualism;
- the seriousness of Jesus' call to self-denial;
- the need to engage the outside world in understanding the Christian faith; and
- the definition of the church, the body of Christ, and its distinguishing features.

1 - On the Heels of the Apostles

With the death of the apostles, the early church faced with enhanced concern the questions of unity, authority, persecution and the measure of truth. The New Testament books had not yet been collected. Various interpretations of the apostles' teaching and the Old Testament were rampant and in some cases were seductive and dangerous. False teachers continued to threaten the faith of believers as they had done in the days of Paul, Peter and John (1 Tim 1:3–7; 2 Pet 2:1–3; 1 Jn 2:18–19, 26). Factious envy and pride within communities of Christians continued to divide the churches (compare 1 Cor 3:1–4). And the persecution of Christians so common in the earliest days of Christianity bled into the second century (Acts 8:1; 1 Cor 4:9–13; Gal 1:13; 2 Thess 1:4 and 2 Tim 3:12).

The Apostolic Fathers

Worship and discipleship as Christ's community in humble unity, doctrinal truth and self-denial—this theme held captive the pens of the earliest Christian writers outside the Bible. These Christians are known as the "apostolic fathers" to indicate their close connection to the times of the apostles. Though some of their documents evidence a lengthy process of composition, involving perhaps different authors and editors, the versions we may read today seem to be dated to

between A.D. 90 and 174. They are small yet precious gems that glitter with the features of Christianity immediately after the New Testament, from the close of the first century to the latter part of the second. Of these writings, especially noteworthy are the following: (1) the letter of *1 Clement* (A.D. 96–98), written by the bishop of Rome to the Christians of Corinth; (2) the letters of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (ca. A.D. 110), written to several churches, including the Ephesians, Romans, Magnesians and Philadelphians; and (3) the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, an account of the death of Polycarp (A.D. 155), bishop of Smyrna, sent in the form of a letter from the church of Smyrna to the church of Philomelium of Phrygia in what is today southern Turkey.

One particular occurrence of the disruption of Christian peace and unity was the division of the Corinthian church at the end of the first century, some forty years after Paul had written 1 Corinthians. Apparently younger, insolent members of the church had challenged and deposed honored bishops (presbyters) within the community for illegitimate reasons. So it is no surprise that Clement, in his letter to the Christians in Corinth, exhorted them to embrace humility: “Let us therefore be humble, brothers, laying aside all arrogance and conceit and foolishness and anger, and let us do what is written. For the Holy Spirit says: ‘Let not the wise man boast about his wisdom, nor the strong about his strength, nor the rich about his

wealth; but let him who boast, boast in the Lord, that he may seek him out, and do justice and righteousness.' "

Furthermore, Clement reminded his readers about the nature of the presbyter's or bishop's office (there was as yet no distinction between a presbyter and a bishop) and about its relationship to Christ and the apostles. For Clement, bishops were holders of a permanent office instituted by the apostles. The apostles had appointed the first bishops and they had intended the office to continue after their deaths. After the apostles, bishops were to be appointed by other reputable leaders with the church's consent. Such men were not to be removed unjustly. In Clement's letter the word *bishops* always occurs in the plural, so we assume that a plurality of bishops existed in both Rome and Corinth. Since the first ones had connections to the apostles, and since the apostles had connections to Christ, the bishop's office was viewed seriously. Humility was required of those in this office. In this light, addressing the arrogant ones, Clement commanded, "You, therefore, who laid the foundation of the revolt, must submit to the presbyters and accept discipline leading to repentance, bending the knees of your heart."

Clement's particular interest was the Corinthian church's humility before their church leaders. But this was just one aspect of his larger concern for the great Christian virtue of submissiveness. It was this virtue, he said, that would lead to unity within the church.

Clement's epistle reminds us that one of the essential components of Christianity is humility. He provides an Old Testament theology of the virtue. In *1 Clement* 13 he cites Jeremiah 9:23–24:

> "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
> or the strong man boast of his strength
> or the rich man boast of his riches,
> but let him who boasts boast about this:
> that he understands and knows me,
> that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
> justice and righteousness on the earth,
> for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

At the end of the same chapter Clement quotes Isaiah 66:2:

> This is the one I esteem:
> he who is humble and contrite in spirit,
> and trembles at my word.

And *1 Clement* 18 includes a quotation of Psalm 51:17:

> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
> a broken and contrite heart,
> O God, you will not despise.

Clement's emphases run parallel with those of Peter and Paul: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' " (1 Pet 5:5). "The elders who direct the affairs

of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those who whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17).

According to the letters of Ignatius, leadership played a critical role in establishing church unity and correct doctrine. However, his letters reflect a situation in which, instead of there being several bishops in a location, there was a single bishop. Ignatius wrote his letters while he was being taken to Rome to be martyred. Arrested in Antioch because of his leadership in an "illegal" religion (Christianity), Ignatius composed epistles that continued to influence the Christian communities of Asia Minor and Rome. He had these special concerns:

- the false doctrines that were entering these communities
- the temptation, because of persecution, for believers to blend Jewish traditions with their Christian faith or to depart to Judaism
- the need for unity among the believers in light of these two dangers

The one doctrinal aberration that seemed especially to capture Ignatius's attention pertained to the person of Christ. Some false teachers were promoting Docetism, the belief that Christ only seemed or appeared to be human and to possess actual flesh. The apostle John had already encountered a similar denial of Christ's flesh in the communities to which he had written his first epistle. He had dealt with it seriously:

“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God,” he told his readers as he warned them about false prophets. “Every Spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus [as having come in the flesh] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 Jn 4:2–3). Earlier, at the very beginning of the same letter, John had emphasized the importance of Christ’s real flesh. The apostles had “heard … seen … looked at … [and] touched … the Word of life” (Jesus), whom they preached (1:1). Christians emphasize the reality and fullness of Jesus Christ’s physical human flesh as well as his full deity.

Taking the threat of Docetism just as seriously as John did, Ignatius emphasized both Christ’s deity and Christ’s humanity. “There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord” (*Ephesians* 7.2).

Ignatius also spoke directly of Christ’s humanity, as seen in his death and resurrection. Writing to the Smyrnaeans (1.2–3.1), Ignatius said that Jesus was “truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch … and he truly suffered just as he truly raised himself—not as certain unbelievers say, that he suffered in appearance only…. For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection.”

In addition to being influenced by false teachers who were spreading heresies about Christ’s person, the

churches of Asia Minor were also being influenced by Judaizers. The apostle Paul had been concerned that some Christians were interested in returning to the traditions of Judaism (Gal 4:8–11). Ignatius, too, was concerned that Judaizers would lead believers to depart from grace and Christ. Like Paul, Ignatius believed that a return to the Jewish communal legislation would be a return to practices now superseded by Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection. Ignatius wrote, "Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or antiquated myths, since they are worthless. For if we continue to live in accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace.... How can we possibly live without him [Jesus], whom even the prophets, who were his disciples in the Spirit, were expecting as their teacher?... Therefore, having become his disciples, let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity.... It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism" (*Magnesians* 8.1–10.3).

Against these threats to the Christian community fostered by the Docetists and Judaizers, Ignatius emphasized the need for unity. For him, division within the community of believers resulted from a failure to maintain a belief in the unity of Christ's two natures, the unity of God and the unity of the church around the Lord's Table. He said that believing that Christ was both human and divine was basic to unity in Christian communities. The unity of these two natures in Jesus was a model for unity in the church. If one denied the

unity of Christ, as the Docetists did, he or she could also deny the oneness of Christ's body.

Ignatius also believed that faith in the unity of God was another essential component of oneness in Christian community. This meant believing that the one true God was perfectly revealed in Jesus. It meant holding to the oneness between Jesus and the Father, between Jesus and the God of the Old Testament. Denial of the intimate relationship between Father and Son—a denial fostered by the Judaizers' attempt to return Christians to the legislation of the Old Testament and thereby to diminish the revelation of Jesus—ultimately led to division in the church. If the Father and Son are not one, then brothers and sisters in Christ have little basis for unity. In Ignatius's emphasis on the connection between the unity of Father and Son and the church's unity one can almost hear an echo of the Lord's prayer in John 17:20–23:

> My prayer is not for them [the apostles] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

In Ignatius's emphasis on the importance of a common faith we can also sense Paul's words. Paul

reminded the Ephesian church of the "one faith" (Eph 4:5) and taught them that the purpose of the diverse gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (or pastor-teachers) was to build the church up "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (4:13).

To this same end (unity in faith) Ignatius pleaded for the unity of believers around submission to the bishop. But where Clement of Rome had defended the authority of a plurality of bishops on the grounds of apostolic succession, Ignatius viewed the authority of the single bishop on other grounds. For him the authority of the bishop was modeled after the authority of God the Father, "the Bishop of all" (*Magnesians* 3.1). Believers, he said, are to show their devotion to God by their submission to the bishop (*Magnesians* 5). Since a bishop is a representative of truth, godliness is shown through submission to the bishop and through a common belief with other Christians. Ignatius wrote to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, "Focus on unity, for there is nothing better" (1.2). Similarly, to the Ephesians he said, "There is nothing better than peace" (13.2). Also he urged the Philadelphians, "Do nothing without the bishop … love unity. Flee from divisions. Become imitators of Jesus Christ, just as he is of his Father" (7.2). And to the Magnesians he wrote, "Do not attempt to convince yourselves that anything done apart from the others is right, but gathering together, let there be one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, with love and

blameless joy, which is Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is better" (7.1).

Some Protestants tend to see in Ignatius's writings an emphasis on a domineering bishop, which later led to certain abuses by the Roman papacy in the Middle Ages. In Clement's and Ignatius's writing we see steppingstones that led to an emphasis later on the Roman bishop and eventually the papacy. But Ignatius's interest was the unity of the believing community in the apostles' doctrine. The bishop was the truth's guardian, for he knew the true meaning of Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection, appearances, ascension and eventual return. He stood in contrast to the Docetists and Judaizers, who were seducing young Christians by means of doctrinal error. Ignatius's heartbeat was a concern that believers be united in common submission to apostolic doctrine. When they agreed with the bishop, they agreed with the apostles and with God.

Furthermore, formal agreement with the apostle's teaching took place not privately in isolation from the community but rather occurred when the individuals came together in one place for the Lord's Supper. The meal signified the church's center around the actual fleshly, bloody death of Christ, a center that opposed the false teaching of both Docetists and Judaizers. Sharing the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist) demonstrated the church's unity under the bishop: "Take care, therefore, to participate in one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup which leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just

as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God" (*Philadelphians* 4).

Ignatius's emphasis on Christian unity based on the apostles' doctrine and the Lord's Supper parallels the New Testament. The early Jerusalem church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Paul had no praise for the Corinthians' selfish, divisive conduct when they came together for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34), conduct that made one "guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). Many were failing to wait for all believers to gather together before they ate. Thus they failed to honor the meaning of the *common* meal and were experiencing judgments including sickness and death. Paul pleaded with the Philippians to "make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil 2:2–3). And to Titus, the apostle wrote, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (Tit 3:10–11).

In addition to the concerns for unity and truth in community shared by Clement and Ignatius, the apostolic fathers shared an additional feature: persecution and martyrdom. We have already noted

that Ignatius penned his letters as he was on the road to martyrdom. We pause now to consider his perspective on that impending eventuality and to, with awe, observe a record of the martyrdom of one faithful Christian, the bishop Polycarp.

For Ignatius, as for many early Christians, martyrdom was discipleship. When modern eyes read his statement about his favorable anticipation of death at Roman hands, a common response is to suggest that he had a serious neurotic dysfunction. But this response fails to understand how the second-century church viewed itself in relation to Jesus' death. We must try to understand the early Christians. After the Lord had predicted his own shame and suffering, he taught the crowds and disciples that Christianity involved imitating him:

> If anyone would *come after* me, he must *deny* himself and take up his *cross* and *follow* me. For whoever wants to save his life will *lose* it, but whoever *loses his life* for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is *ashamed* of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be *ashamed* of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. (Mk 8:34–38, italics added)

For the second-century believer, since discipleship meant following Christ, then being his disciple may very well involve stepping into the blood-soaked footprints

left by Jesus under the cross. To rebel against martyrdom—that is, to retreat—would be a failure to imitate Jesus in his quiet submission to death (Is 53:7; Mt 27:14; Mk 15:5; Lk 23:9; Jn 19:9). Cowardice would mean a believer was disobedient to the words Peter penned years after his own shameful failure in discipleship: "To this *you were called*, because Christ suffered for you, *leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps*. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth' [Is 53:9]. When they hurled their insults at him, *he did not retaliate;* when he suffered, *he made no threats*. Instead, *he entrusted himself* to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:21–23, italics added).

Self-pity in the face of martyrdom would be a failure to imitate Jesus in his words to the women who mourned for him on his way to be crucified: "Daughters of Jerusalem," Jesus said, "do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children" (Lk 23:28).

Ignatius's arrest and sure death were God's call to his next footstep in Christlike discipleship. If the just Father had so willed that he would die as his Lord had done, not asking for release and not arguing his defense, then he was willing to die. For this reason Ignatius wrote in his letter to the Romans, "I am writing to all the churches and am insisting to everyone that I die for God of my own free will—unless you hinder me. I implore you: do not be 'unseasonably kind' to me. Let me be food for the wild beast.… Then I will truly be a

disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will no longer see my body" (4.1–2).

Such accounts leave us stunned, perplexed and almost incredulous. How, we demand, could a Christian be a masochist? How could a mature believer, a bishop, a church leader hold such a bizarre view of death? In our culture—even our *Christian* culture, which underscores self-fulfillment and self-preservation—such statements appear grotesque, even repulsive. This view, however, may say more about the oddity of modern Christianity and its view of what constitutes discipleship than about the eccentricity of Ignatius. He would not embrace self-preservation at the expense of not imitating Christ. He was willing to surrender to the Father's will because he was not greater than his Master.

Though we have records of Ignatius's perspective on his own martyrdom, we lack an account of his actual death. But we do have the martyrdom account of the apostolic father Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (ca. 155/156?). The account, written by the church at Smyrna to the church at Philomelium (and other Christian communities) honored Polycarp as one who was noble, patient in endurance and loyal to the Master (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1.2). He was passive and compliant in his arrest, even setting a table of refreshment for the arresting officials. He prayed two hours for all those he knew personally and for the church spread throughout the world before he was taken to the stadium. Brought before the proconsul,

who attempted to persuade him to recant his Christianity, Polycarp replied, “For eighty-six years I have been a servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” So the proconsul said, “I have wild beasts; I will throw you to them, unless you change your mind.” But Polycarp said, “Call for them! For the repentance from better to worse is a change impossible for us; but it is a noble thing to change from that which is evil to righteousness.” Then the proconsul announced, “I will have you consumed by fire, since you despise the wild beasts, unless you change your mind.” But Polycarp replied, “You threaten with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished, for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Come, do what you wish.”

From the beginning of the third century, and also from around the middle of the fourth century, we have other stunning accounts of Christian martyrdom. One records the faithfulness of a young mother, Perpetua, who was arrested along with five friends and martyred in 203. Although she had an infant son and her pagan father tried desperately to convince her to deny that she was a Christian, she remained firm in her conviction. She insisted that she admit to being what she was—a Christian. Another account is one of several texts recording the martyrdom of Persian Christians. It tells us of the trial and execution of Martha, who followed her father, Posi, in martyrdom and who in the last words of

her final prayer petitioned God to preserve the faith of the believers in her community and to strengthen them in a true trinitarian worship and confession. Here again is the remarkable perspective on discipleship by the early church.

The Apologists

As the second century progressed, Roman criticism of Christianity continued to grow. However, this criticism was not unique to the apostolic fathers and the apologists. Already in the first century Suetonius, a Roman historian, had recorded that in Nero's reign Christians had been punished because they held to a novel, superstitious religion (*Lives of Caesars* 16.2). The Romans said the religions of many people were superstitious, including the Christians, the Egyptians and the Jews. The Romans' polytheistic religion was central to their way of life, and all social events were religious in nature. If a religion (like Christianity) did not join hand in hand with Roman pagan society, it was often doomed to persecution. This happened because the Romans feared the punishment of their gods. If the Christians were allowed to disrupt the unity of Roman religion and society, the gods (the Romans believed) would bring curses on Rome.

Roman religion also was intimately related to the past. Greco-Roman society held that the rites of the ancients were more harmonious with the gods than the newer rites. That is, the past was closer to the ancient gods. For Roman society, only one ancient religious doctrine existed, and it was expressed and maintained in a variety of traditional forms by various nations. Abandonment of these variant but traditional forms and customs was wicked. Novelty in religions, they thought, was irreligious. Therefore, because Christians were seen as antisocial and "new," they were viewed as a danger

to Rome. The gods were unhappy and had to be pacified.

When Christians worshiped only one God, their polytheistic Roman neighbors viewed them as atheistic. When Christians gathered in worship, separate from Roman life, they were seen as destructive to the social structure of the empire. In their refusal to confess the emperor's deity they were viewed as wicked. This refusal to engage in civic religion led the Christian apologist Tertullian to write that the Romans considered Christians "public enemies" and "enemies of Rome."

But the Romans did not end their criticism of Christianity with reference to what they viewed as irreligious. They also criticized Christianity for being irrational. Christians seemed to receive their teachings by faith rather than by rational examination of the evidence or critical thinking. According to the Christian theologian Origen, one Roman, Celsus, wrote that some Christians said, "Do not ask questions, only believe."

Also, the Romans interpreted some Christian practices as deplorable because of what seemed to be a secretiveness, a ridiculous perspective of life, death and future judgment, an arrogant haughtiness toward Roman religion and a lifestyle of perversity. Minucius Felix, a Latin Christian apologist of the third century, recorded some early Roman understandings of Christian rites and beliefs. Many unbelievers thought that Christians were "a people skulking and shunning the light, silent in public but garrulous in corners. They despise the temples as dead-houses, they reject the

gods, they laugh at sacred things.... They know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another. Everywhere also there is mingled among them a certain religion of lust, and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters."

The belief that Christians were clandestine in their gatherings because of their shameful "incest" (because they married those they called "brother" and "sister") was common, as was the charge that they were cannibalistic (they ate the body of Christ and drank his blood). Because of the secret nature of their rites, and also because some groups claiming association with Christianity were reported to have engaged in acts of perversity, the rumors grew to absurd proportions. Christians were even accused of eating infants. The Christian apologist Athenagoras was accurate when he said, "Three charges are brought against us: atheism, Thyestean feasts [cannibalistic banquets] and Oedipean intercourse [incestuous unions]."

As strange as it may sound to modern Christian ears, the Romans were appalled at the supposed wickedness, social rebellion, irrationality and impiety of the Christians. The "popular and uncritical rumor" about Christians, to use the language of Athenagoras, set the tone for how the Romans responded. Of course, we ought not think that early Christianity was perfect or without blame. Many Christians did not balance their faith in the one true God through Jesus Christ with a biblical call to morality and state loyalty. In addition,

some non-Christians who associated with believers were said to have practiced their Roman religion in feasts that *did* involve promiscuous rites. On the whole, though, the charges of rampant perversity in Christ's body within the Roman Empire were false.

The apologists of the second century took it on themselves to defend the church against such charges. And though their work was done honorably, we should never forget that such accusations against the church motivated by hatred for Christ are not to be seen as strange or odd. Rather, they are to be taken as blessings, after the words of our Lord: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11–12; see also Lk 6:22). What the second-century believers endured was fully in line with Jesus' promise. Erroneous views about Christianity that led to believers being marginalized socially, and incarcerated, tortured and killed, was consistent with what Jesus had said they could expect. Persecution is a blessing with reward (Jas 1:5, 12). As R. T. France, meditating on Jesus' promise of recompense for suffering, reminds us, "no-one will be a loser in any ultimate sense, by becoming a disciple of Christ."

In their defense of Christianity before the Roman emperors the second-century apologists did not try to argue that suffering was harmful to the growth of Christianity. In fact they pointed out the opposite. Justin

Martyr, a major apologist writing around 150–160, insisted that as Christians were tortured they did not renounce their confession in Christ (*Dialog with [the Jew] Trypho* 110–14). Instead large numbers of people were converted to Christianity because believers did not renounce their faith in the face of suffering. The *Letter to Diognetus*, an anonymous Christian apology of the second century, also stated that "Christians, when punished day by day increase more and more. It is to no less a post than this that God has ordered them, and they must not try and evade it."

Neither did the apologists seek to justify any wickedness present in Christianity. Instead, they sought to explain what Christians really believed and what they really practiced. Persecution was the result, they believed, of uninvestigated charges, unreasonable emotions and demonic persecution (Justin, *First Apology* 5). They appealed for justice against slander, hopeful that an explanation of Christianity as reasonable, thoughtful, moral, civic-minded and ancient would result in toleration of their religion. Such appeals were made to the emperor's own sense of justice.

Two apologists, Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, are noted for the way they stood in the gap to defend Christianity. Of concern to both of them was that Christian morality be portrayed. In his *First Apology* (ca. 150) Justin described the lives of Christians this way:

> Those who once rejoiced in fornication now delight in continence alone; those who made use of magic arts have dedicated themselves to the good and

> unbegotten God; we who once took most pleasure in the means of increasing our wealth and property now bring what we have into common fund and share with everybody in need; we who hated and killed one another and would not associate with men of different tribes because of [their different] customs, now after the manifestation of Christ live together and pray for our enemies.

Athenagoras wrote similarly in his *Plea for Christians* (ca. 177), as he contrasted Christian conduct with the conduct of those who were accepted and even honored by Rome: "When struck, they do not strike back; when robbed, they do not sue; to those who ask, they give; and they love their neighbors as themselves. If we did not think that a God ruled over the human race, would we live in such purity? The idea is impossible. But since we are persuaded that we must give an account of all our life here to God who made us and the world, we adopt a temperate, generous, and despised way of life." Athenagoras also wrote, "We, however, cannot refrain from turning the cheek when we are struck, nor from blessing when we are reviled. For it is not enough to be just—justice consisting in returning blows—but we have to be generous and to put up with evil." These challenging writings echo Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:38–48.

This second-century apologetic anticipated a small book written by Francis Schaeffer. In *The Mark of the Christian* he wrote on the basis of John 17:21 that the "final apologetic" was the love of Christians for each

other. (John 17:21 records that Jesus prayed that the church may be in unity so that the world would believe that he is from the Father.) Schaeffer said, "We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians." The Christian ethic is always the first line of defense, whether in the second century or the twenty-first.

Justin and Athenagoras also informed the emperors about their civic loyalties, which they understood in good Roman fashion to be a constituent part of Christianity as well as Roman religion. For the apologists, being obedient to Christ and Paul's teachings included civic loyalty. Listen to Justin's words, written in times of persecution:

> More even than others we try to pay the taxes and assessments to those whom you appoint, as we have been taught by him [Christ]. For once in his time some came to him and asked whether it were right to pay taxes to Caesar. And he answered, "Tell me, whose image is on the coin." They said, "Caesar's." And he answered them again, "Then give what is Caesar's to Caesar and what is God's to God" [Mt 22:20–21; Mk 2:14–17; Lk 20:22–25]. So we worship God only, but in other matters we gladly serve you.

In addition to explaining Christian ethics and civic-mindedness, the apologists were also concerned with defending their monotheism against the charge of atheism. Athenagoras went to great length in arguing

the reasonableness and the propriety of faith in only one God. He did so by appealing to the universe's order, to pagan poets and philosophers who were also monotheists, and to the rational argument that points up the implausibility of the existence of two or more sovereign, competing deities. Ultimately, however, he confessed that belief in the one true God on these bases would be merely human. The monotheistic faith of Christians is confirmed not by rational argumentation but by the ancient testimonies of the Spirit-inspired prophets, whom he cited (Ex 20:2–20; Is 43:10–11; 44:6; 66:1).

In their effort to dispel charges of Christianity's offensive peculiarity, these second-century apologists helped build bridges between Christian thought and practice and the culture of Rome. In many ways their method was one of asking for toleration by demonstrating how similar they were to the tolerated mainstream or even to Rome's highest values. In a time when guilt by association with the name "Christian," fueled by paranoia and false understandings, led to persecution, such bridges were wise, could soothe fiery tempers and could give opportunity for further dialogue. The apologists knew the philosophy of the day and exploited it in communicating the reasonableness and acceptability of Christianity within their culture. But as has been shown, their faith and practice did not constitute a surrender to that culture but rather were a submission to the teachings of the prophets, the Lord and his disciples. In obeying the Scriptures they were

saying, “We’re not bad citizens. Nor are we bad Romans. Therefore don’t believe the prejudiced crowds and persecute us. We’re different but tolerable.”

For the apologists the central Christian task had become one of explaining what Christianity actually was in the face of persecution. This is always a Christian task.

Irenaeus and the Heretics

The paranoia, hatred and misunderstanding of the Romans were not the only threats facing the church. The problem of Roman persecution came from *outside* the community, but the problem of heresy arose from *within* the church, from those who falsely claimed to be Christians. Though several groups of unorthodox people could be discussed, we will focus on two, the Gnostics and the Marcionites, and on one great churchman, Irenaeus of Lyon, who labored diligently to protect the church from their harmful teachings.

Around 180, Irenaeus wrote five books against the heresies that were threatening his people. The most prevalent heresy was Gnosticism. The Gnostics taught that salvation was based on a secret knowledge to which only they were privy. These false teachers were seducing members of Irenaeus's parish.

Come back with me to a marketplace in the center of the ancient city of Lugdunum, Gaul (now called Lyon, France). You and your spouse are shopping for fresh vegetables, the fish catch of the day and some oil for your household lamps. As you pause before the tomatoes and carrots displayed by the merchant Cletus, his nephew Marcus, a confessing Christian not part of Irenaeus's congregation, engages you in conversation. "So, I understand that you two regard yourselves as believers in Christ," he says with a smile.

"Yes," you respond. "We follow the teachings of our bishop, Irenaeus."

"Oh," he says sharply. "I'm a believer in Christ, who came to us in Jesus from the Father in order to reveal the truth about God to us. Is this what your community believes?"

"Yes, of course," you insist. "We're Christians."

"Well, I am not sure that Irenaeus has told you everything that's involved in truly being Christian."

You look at him curiously and ask, "What do you mean, 'not everything'? We believe exactly what you said you believe!"

"Oh, really," he replies with a smirk. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk—shall we?—and let me explain exactly what I believe and what your 'trustworthy' bishop Irenaeus is keeping from you. He wants to control you and prevent you from having what he can't have."

You follow Marcus through a dark doorway behind the vegetable stand where he begins to explain his "Christian" faith. When he finishes, you and your spouse are stunned. You look at each other open-mouthed. He had used the Old Testament and the writings of the Evangelists and Paul. He had spoken with such conviction and sincerity. He had used all the phrases, catchwords and Bible verses that you hear at your Lord's Supper and Scripture reading services. But although he sounded just like you, he hadn't meant the same thing. You and your spouse, having been under Irenaeus's teaching for several years, quickly thank Marcus and leave without another word. The newly baptized couple from your congregation who arrive at

the vegetable stand as you leave, however, will not be as fortunate. Following is what Marcus the Gnostic had explained to you. It is one version of various forms of the Gnostic myth.

The "Father" whom Marcus had spoken of was the eternal, unknowable, spiritual, supreme deity. This Father had issued forth from himself spiritual beings known as Aeons. They had names like "Christ," "Logos," "Savior" and "Sophia." At some point "Sophia" decided inappropriately, with pride and arrogance, that she could and would arrive at a knowledge of the unknowable, highest Father. Her pride and arrogance resulted in her begetting another being named Yaldabaoth, who was known as the Demiurge, or Creator. He inherited his mother's faults of sin, pride, arrogance and evil. It was this being, not the highest Father, who created the physical world. For Marcus, then, the Creator—the God of the Old Testament, Yahweh of Israel—is *not* the supreme Father. He is an evil, arrogant, lower being. When he explained a prophetic passage such as Isaiah 46:9, in which God announced his exclusivity by saying, "I am God and there is no other," Marcus said this was the Demiurge pridefully asserting his uniqueness out of ignorance of the true Father. As a consequence the material world created by the Demiurge has the characteristics of the Creator. Everything physical, the earth and particularly the human body, is seen as evil, bad, even putrid.

Marcus then explained that there was an attempt by the good spiritual beings to correct the perversion of

the creation of a physical world. But Yaldabaoth was able to capture some of the heavenly, spiritual elements and hold them captive within some *bad* physical bodies. Marcus called these spiritual elements "seeds of light," "the inner person," or most often, "the spirits." "So," Marcus had summarized, "*some* human bodies, putrid as they are, house the only valuable eternal element we call the spirit. There are two kinds of humans: those who have the seed or spirit (the elect) and those who don't. The ultimate goal, what I regard as *salvation*, is the release of the *real me*, my *spirit*, from my worthless body so that I can ascend back to the spiritual world. Ultimate salvation is my spirit flying away from this shell, this tomb, of the body."

"I suppose you are interested in how one can be saved," he asked slyly. Both of you had nodded yes, with eyes big as saucers. "Well, I believe that the spiritual being 'Christ' came from the Father to redeem the spirits imprisoned by the wicked Creator. He did this by revealing the true knowledge of the Father to us. Now, this 'Christ' being could not, of course, become a human, because that would entail having a putrid body. So either he merely appeared to be human or he simply indwelt a human named 'Jesus' by adopting him as his 'carrier,' his vehicle. So, you see, there are really two and not one. There is the human being, 'Jesus' (or merely the appearance of a human) and the spiritual being, 'Christ.' This Christ revealed to his disciples the *knowledge* that the Creator of the Old Testament is *not* the true God. The true God is the Father of Christ. It is

this knowledge that saves and that releases my spirit from my body."

Such Gnostic theology was quite prominent in the second century and was a serious threat to the church. It employed the language of Christianity and even misused the Scriptures of Christianity to develop its system of belief. In essence it was *dualistic*. That is, it assigned extreme, opposite values to differing realities and utterly distinguished things that the Bible holds together: Spirit is good, but the body and other physical things are bad; the spiritual Father is the true, good God, but the Creator is a bad impostor; the spirit Christ is the true Savior, but the human Jesus is only a shell; elect humans are good, but other humans are dispensable; the New Testament is the good news of salvation, but the Old Testament is a record of false religion.

One tricky thing about Gnostics, Irenaeus thought, was that before they explained their system they *sounded* so orthodox, so biblical. Referring to Jesus' warning about false prophets in Matthew 7:15, Irenaeus frequently thought of them as "wolves in sheep's clothing." He wrote, "Such men are to outward appearance sheep; for they appear to be like us by what they say in public, repeating the same words as we do; but inwardly they are wolves." He described them as those who have mixed up a poison and passed it off as a refreshing drink.

The other tricky thing about Gnostics, for Irenaeus, was that they used the Scriptures to support their

system. But *using* the Scripture, he pointed out, meant nothing. Anyone can use the Bible to support his or her position. Anyone can manipulate the Scriptures in an attempt to make them fit his or her views. All you need to do is pay attention to some parts, ignore other parts, take a sentence or a word here, connect that to a sentence or word there, and you have rewritten Scripture into a pattern that fits what you want it to say.

Irenaeus opposed the Gnostics by explaining to his Christian community the proper "fit" of Scripture in light of the traditional teachings of the church passed down from the apostles to the bishops. Irenaeus taught his congregation what the church had taught before the Gnostics showed up. He appreciated the strength that resulted from a healthy union between Scripture and tradition. The interpretation of Scripture passed down by the apostles and preserved by the bishops was a safeguard in the face of heretics who also appealed to Scripture. The issue brought to the foreground by the Gnostics was that anybody can appeal to Scripture. Anybody can "use" the Bible, but the question is, how are they interpreting the Bible?

Against the dualistic theology of the Gnostics, Irenaeus emphasized several doctrines. First, there exists only one God, who is both the Creator, the God of the Old Testament, and the Father of Jesus Christ. Second, Jesus is the incarnate, eternal Son and Word of the Father. Third, although there is some difference between the Old and New Testaments (before and after the incarnation), they are both parts of the one history

of redemption. Fourth, since the Father, through his Son, is the Creator of the physical body and of the earth, the physical world has value. The body will be raised incorruptible and reunited with the immaterial part of the human (spirit, soul), and the earth, purified by fire, will be refashioned or renewed. Fifth, there is only one humanity, all of which is fallen and in need of redemption. There is no elitism in humanity, such as a distinction between the "spiritual ones" of the Father and the "material ones" of the Creator. Redemption is accomplished by the eternal Son of God, who became human and thereby through his incarnation united God with humanity. Jesus Christ as God *who is human* introduces into humanity's sad, decaying history a hope for humanity's immortality. As "the last Adam," Christ began a new line of humanity destined for eternal glory, and he reversed the cause and effect of the first Adam.

Most pointedly, what distinguished Irenaeus from the heretics was his theme of unity and his commitment to interpreting Scripture within the parameters of the faith passed down from apostle to bishop. What has been entrusted from one faithful Christian to another always plays an important role in interpretation.

To Irenaeus, tradition was an important source of information on what the Bible taught. It's not strange that we find the Bible itself speaking about the importance of heeding those faithful ones who have gone before us and passing on to others what we receive. Four times Paul wrote about this to Timothy:

> Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Tim 6:20–21)
>
> What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Tim 1:13–14)
>
> The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim 2:2)
>
> Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it. (2 Tim 3:14)

As we saw in Gnosticism, some people exploit Scripture for their own ends. Therefore, what faithful Christians through the years have been saying Scripture means can be helpful in preventing our own misinterpretations. In Irenaeus's day the central function of church leaders was to explain what the prophets, the Lord and the apostles had meant by what they had said. What Scripture said was given a formal interpretation, which set the apostolic teaching apart from that of the heretics. Anybody, it had become clear, could *say* they believed in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior sent by the Father. But what did they *mean* by terms like "Jesus Christ," "personal Savior" and

"Father"? Church leaders like Irenaeus explained the ways those words and phrases were to be understood properly. I like what Martin Marty says about Gnosticism: "Fusing a pagan ancestry with Christian deviations, it knew many of the words but little of the music of the song of Christian redemption."

Another heresy that threatened the second century church was Marcionism. Named after its founder, Marcion, it too held that there are two Gods: a wrathful, judgmental one of the Old Testament and a gracious, good one of the New. Marcion viewed the Jews, their Scriptures and their religion as of no value because of their association with the "old God." His Bible, therefore, included only New Testament books that in his judgment were antithetical to the "Law-oriented" religion of the Jews. These books included only Luke's Gospel and ten of Paul's Epistles. Irenaeus opposed Marcion in his *Against Heresies*, as did Tertullian in his *Against Marcion*. Again, these theologians emphasized the unity between the Testaments, which reveals the unity of the one God and Father of both Israel and the church.

Although Marcion answered the question incorrectly, the question he asked is a pivotal one in Christian thinking: What is the relationship of the Old Testament, the law, and the religious faith and practice of Israel to the church? Marcion's answer was that there is no relationship.

Christians today still debate the relationship of the Old Testament law to believers. The Old Testament still

struggles in many pulpits for equal time with the New. Certain pocket editions of the Bible can give believers the impression that only two Old Testament books—Psalms and Proverbs—are critical to their growth in Christ. The church as a whole has not reached a consensus on how to view the relationship between the two Testaments. However, early on the church dispensed quickly and firmly with Marcion's answer. Under the New Covenant, the church has an intimate connection to the history of salvation in the Old Covenant. The Old Testament anticipates the New; the New Testament fulfills, interprets and complements the Old. When Paul wrote "All Scripture is profitable" (2 Tim 3:16 KJV), he was thinking mainly of the Old Testament.

Heresy did not go away as the church matured. In the fourth and fifth centuries it would struggle with delineating properly the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's person. Thankfully, gifted theologians would guide the church into the safety of the one true faith. This story awaits us in the next chapter.

2 - Councils of Doctrine, Cloisters of Holiness

In the early part of the fourth century Christianity began to experience a new relationship with emperor and state. In A.D. 312 Constantine, emperor of Gaul and Britain, expanded his rule throughout the West by a decisive victory against his rival Maxentius. Following a vision, he pledged loyalty to Christianity, went into battle under Christian symbols, defeated Maxentius and credited his victory to the Christian God. This led to the empire's first pro-Christian policy, evidenced in the state's recognition of the Christian God and the easing of persecution. In 313 an agreement reached between Constantine and the co-emperor Licinius resulted in the Edict of Milan, which introduced a policy for the toleration of Christianity. Not until 380, however, did the emperor Theodosius I ban paganism and give Christianity the status of the state religion.

Although the threat of persecution was waning, heresy in the fourth century continued to be a critical concern. In the second century, in the face of the Gnostics and the Marcionites, the church had to press for belief in the unity of the Old and New Testaments. But the church in the fourth century faced the critical concern of the unity between God the Father and his Son. The trinitarian controversy—which struggled with how Christians were to describe the relationship

between the Father and the Son and, later, the Spirit—began in Alexandria, Egypt.

The Doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ

Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, was preaching from the Bible, with Proverbs 8:22 as a central verse, that the Son is not eternal with the Father but is created by the Father. That verse, which attributes the first-person pronoun to "wisdom," reads as follows: "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old." Arius and his followers argued their doctrine from this verse, which speaks of the creation of wisdom, and from the common early Christian understanding of Christ as "wisdom' (1 Cor 1:24, 30). These verses, these errant teachers said, subordinate Christ, the Son, to the Father, who alone is God and who had begotten—that is, *created*—a Son. Other passages they pointed to in support of their view were Psalm 45:7–8 and Isaiah 1:2 and the words "only begotten" in John 1:14, 18. Thus, according to Arius, it was not true to say "Always God, always Son" or "At the same time Father, at the same time Son," meaning that God the Father and God the Son are co-eternal and both possess the quality of deity. Rather, Arius proclaimed that "before [the Son] was begotten or created or defined or established, he was not for he was not unbegotten" and that "the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning." For Arius, the Son is a creature and is not eternal.

Arius's heresy brought forth the theological rebuttal of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria. Because of the havoc and schism it caused within the empire, it eventually led to Constantine's calling the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (in modern-day Turkey) during the winter of 324–325. Being "ecumenical," the synod's decision would be binding on the church throughout the world. The critical concern was the Son's essence and his relationship to the Father. The participants in the debate included principally the church's bishops but also Christian thinkers of nonepiscopal rank. In the end, on June 19, 325, the Nicene Creed affirmed that the Son shared the Father's divine nature.

> We believe in one God, Father, all-sovereign, maker of all things seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father as only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, *homoousios* [Greek for "of the same essence"], one in, with the Father, through whom all things came to existence, the things in heaven and the things on earth, who because of men and our salvation came down and was incarnated, made man, suffered, and arose on the third day, ascended into heaven, comes to judge the living and the dead; and in one Holy Spirit. And those who say "there was once when he was not" or "he was not before he was begotten" or "he came into existence from nothing" or who affirm that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* [Greek, "nature"]

> or substance, or a creature, or mutable or subject to change, such ones the catholic and apostolic church pronounces accursed and separated from the church.

As a result, Arius was exiled and so were others who shared or were sympathetic with his views. Despite his doctrinal error, though, the bishops of the eastern region of the empire reestablished him in the church ten years later. Had he not died in 336, he would have regained his place among the pastors of Alexandria. However, Arianism remained a challenge to the orthodoxy of Nicaea into at least the last quarter of the fourth century.

Athanasius of Alexandria—who was a deacon from 311 to 328, during the early years of the Arian controversy—succeeded Alexander as bishop in 328. He was one of the church's finest theologians. Two of his writings are important to mention. In the first work, *On the Incarnation*, he developed from Scripture the key understanding of salvation as humanity's re-creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. Through his death the incarnate (human) Word took on himself humanity's God-appointed destiny of defeat by death. Through his resurrection the glorified, incorruptible, incarnate (human) Word renewed and recreated immortal humanity's corruptible, fallen nature. Athanasius said salvation is the renewal of our human nature, in all its features, material and immaterial (spirit and body), into the full, glorious image of God. God the Word (Jesus Christ) became human to renew what was human, to sanctify

humanity through intimate unity with God. Salvation is not the salvation of humans to some nonhuman condition, to some mystical, intangible state. It is the salvation of humans in the sense that our human nature is retrieved from death and corruption by the One who shared our corruptible nature unto death and renewed it to immortality in his resurrection. Many of Paul's teachings reveal this close connection between the humanity of the Word of God and the salvation of our humanity.

> The gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam] how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the *one man*, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Rom 5:15, italics added)
>
> For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the *one man*, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17, italics added)
>
> For just as through the disobedience of the man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the *one man* [Jesus Christ] the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:19, italics added)
>
> For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead comes also through *a man*. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor 15:21–22, italics added)

> For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Tim 2:5–6, italics added)

By uniting his deity with our humanity, the eternal Word of God defeated death and raised the humanity of those who believe in him to the sure hope of immortal glory.

A second writing of Athanasius worth noting is his *Against the Arians*. From this important work one argument stands out: God alone can initiate and accomplish salvation. Therefore the Word of God, who became flesh, could not be a creature, as Arius asserted, but he must be of one substance with the Father—that is, he must fully share the "Godness" of the Father. Athanasius's *Against the Arians* became the classic rebuttal to Arianism.

The Second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 381, filled out what the Council of Nicaea had left unsaid about the Holy Spirit. Convened by Emperor Theodosius I to unify the Christian faith (and thereby important elements of the empire) against the subordination of the Son or Spirit to the Father, 150 church leaders agreed on two pivotal ideas. First, they ratified, with minor alterations, the Creed of Nicaea. Second, they added a statement on the Holy Spirit, which declared him one in substance with the Father and Son. Although this creed, known as the Creed of Constantinople, was not officially received until its reading at the Council of Chalcedon seventy years later,

in 451, it accurately reflects the faith of the council in 381. The addition concerning the Spirit reads:

> And [we believe] in the Holy spirit,
> the Lord and life-giver,
> who proceeds from the Father,
> who is worshiped and glorified together
> with the Father and Son,
> who spoke through the prophets.

By 381 the church had decided that the biblical words *begotten, Son, proceeds* and *Spirit* do not indicate a difference of substance or essence among the Father, the Son and the Spirit. They all share deity, "Godness," fully and equally.

Three theologians who helped Christians in the latter half of the fourth century think more clearly about the trinitarian God are known as the Cappadocians: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. They emphasized God's unity of essence along with his eternal existence as three persons. The language chosen to communicate this mysterious, yet biblically revealed and therefore necessarily binding concept of the Christian God, was "One *ousia* [Greek for 'substance' or 'essence'] and three *hypostases* [Greek taken to mean 'persons']." In one of his letters Basil expressed the soundness of the church's faith in this way:

> If we have no distinct perception of the separate characteristics, namely, fatherhood, sonship, and sanctification, but form our conception of God from

> the general idea of existence, we cannot possibly give a sound account of our faith. We must, therefore, confess the faith by adding the particular to the common. The Godhead is common; the fatherhood particular. We must therefore combine the two and say, "I believe in God the Father." The like course must be pursued in the confession of the Son; we must combine the particular with the common and say, "I believe in God the Son." So in the case of the Holy Spirit we must make our utterance conform to the appellation and say, "I believe also in the divine Holy Spirit." Hence it results that there is a satisfactory preservation of the unity by the confession of the one Godhead, while in the distinction of the individual properties regarded in each other there is the confession of the peculiar properties of the Persons.

After the leaders of the church developed and expressed the trinitarian faith, they next turned their theological skills to the question of the person of Christ. The Son, they knew, was one in essence with the Father and the Spirit. But how were they to understand God the Son's relationship to humanity in the incarnation? What did it mean for the Word to become flesh (Jn 1:14)? Two or three answers were offered, all of which the church ultimately found unacceptable. This led to the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451.

One unacceptable model of the relationship between the deity and flesh of Jesus Christ is known as Word-flesh Christology, associated with Apollinarius of Laodicea (ca. 315–393). In his understanding the divine

Word replaced the human spirit, soul and mind in Jesus so that the flesh was the only human element Jesus possessed. In this way Apollinarius emphasized the unity of Christ's person: Christ was a divine, immaterial center controlling and guiding outward human, physical flesh. Christ was the Word become *flesh* but not the Word become *human*. Apollinarius sacrificed the humanity of Christ for the unity of Christ's person.

Another view the church rejected was the Christology associated with Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (ca. 381–451). Although perhaps wrongly attributed to Nestorius, the view has traditionally been called Nestorianism, or Word-human Christology. Nestorianism, in contrast to Apollinarianism, emphasized the fullness of both the Word's deity and his humanity. But it emphasized them to such a degree that Christ was spoken of as almost two persons: one divine and one human, the Word of God and the human Jesus. Nestorianism sacrificed the unity of Christ's person for the fullness of deity and humanity.

The church also found a third model of Christology unacceptable: Eutychianism. Again, it is not totally clear that the one charged with promoting this view actually believed it, but it is traditionally linked with him. Eutyches, head of a monastery in Constantinople in the middle of the fifth century, confessed two natures before the incarnation but only one after the incarnation. This was understood to teach that the human nature had been absorbed by the divine nature.

Although all these views were ultimately insufficient, they were all attempts to understand the biblical revelation concerning Christ's person and the relationship between his deity and humanity. After Nicaea, the church confessed that the Word of God, God's Son, was of one substance with the Father's "Godness"—in other words, that the Son is deity. But what does John 1:14 mean by saying that God the Word "became flesh"? Did it mean that he just appeared to be human? Did it mean that he was just flesh, skin, bones, blood and organs, not fully human with a human mind, soul and spirit? Did it mean that he had simply assumed a human nature but that the human and divine remained separate? Did it mean that now there were actually two Beings, one who did divine, Godlike things (healing people, walking on water, raising dead people to life) and another who did weak, humanlike things (sleeping, eating, being tired, dying)? At the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon the church rejected all such interpretations of John 1:14. (The third council, mentioned briefly below, was held twenty years earlier in Ephesus.)

This is, after all, what church leaders do. They explain to their congregations acceptable parameters within which they are to understand and interpret the Bible. They also point out unacceptable interpretations. Good theology doesn't just happen. Church leaders who care for their congregations don't allow unacceptable thinking about the Trinity and Christ's person to go

unchecked. What one thinks about Christ's person or God really matters. As A. W. Tozer said:

> What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.… For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his heart conceives God to be like.… Before the Christian church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simple basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, "What is God like?" and goes on from there.

This wrong answer applies to both the congregation's view of God as Trinity and to its view about God the Son's incarnation. Church leaders must first be the church's theologians. Knowing this, the church leaders at Chalcedon delivered to the church this great statement about Christ our Lord:

> Following, therefore, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all agree in teaching that this very same Son is complete in his deity and complete—the very same—in his humanity, truly God and truly a human being, this very same one being composed of rational soul and a body, co-essential with the Father as to his deity, and co-essential with us—the very same one—as to his humanity, being like us in every respect apart from sin. As to his deity, he was born from the Father before the ages, but as to his humanity, the

> very same one was born in the last days from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, for our sake and the sake of our salvation: one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten, acknowledged to be unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures, since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the character of each nature is preserved and comes together in one person and one hypostasis, not divided or torn into two persons but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Logos, Lord Jesus Christ—just as in earlier times the prophets and also the Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us about Him, and the symbol of our Fathers transmitted to us.

This Chalcedonian Creed emphasizes the oneness of Christ's person and the distinction of his full two natures, divine and human, in unity with each other. Against the Apollinarians, it teaches that Christ had a human soul in addition to human flesh. Against the Nestorians, it teaches that Christ's two natures are distinct yet not divided or separable. Against the Eutychians, it taught that Christ was of the same human essence as we are and that both of his natures (human and divine) exist without either being absorbed by the other.

Sometimes the creed's reference to Mary as "Mother of God" *(Theotokos)* is troublesome to Protestants. But the phrase was fundamentally christological, included to defeat the view of Nestorius. The great theologian Cyril of Alexandria had introduced

it against the Nestorian heresy at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. The point is that we can't merely refer to the child born to Mary as "that human baby." Mary's son is also, even in the humility of birth, *God* the Son. Therefore, as the woman who birthed *God* the Son when he became human, Mary is rightly, in that sense, the mother of God, the one of whom God incarnate was born. It says nothing of Mary as God's Creator or Life-giver.

Do the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Chalcedon answer all our questions about the Trinity and the incarnation? No. But they do give us boundaries within which we find acceptable interpretations of the Scriptures about the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. We may not have all the answers, but we know things we *should* say and believe and we know views we *shouldn't* hold. Mature Christians may be more than those who know and confess true doctrine, but they can never be less.

The Practice of Monasticism

"Christians found many ways to express their separation." So wrote Martin Marty in his helpful little book *A Short History of Christianity*, under his brief treatment of monasticism. He added that "for some, holiness was to be found in the attempt at complete isolation and removal from the world."

Arising in the latter part of the third century and finding more concrete expression within the fourth, the monastic movement took various paths of asceticism in

both solitary life and community. The hermits, or anchorites, retreated early to the desert of Egypt, where they struggled against the forces of darkness through constant prayer, fasting, reading and reciting of the Bible, and manual labor. Though given to isolation, the hermits often practiced their ascetic lifestyle in common areas. An early leader was Antony of Egypt. In Syria the hermitic life would at times embrace some extremes not practiced elsewhere. For example, one Syrian ascetic, Simon the Stylite, sat atop a high column for thirty years, praying, preaching and offering counsel to those who came to observe him.

However, not all monks were religious recluses. Communities of monks, traced back in Egypt to Pachomius, also developed. All their property was held in common; the monks practiced spiritual disciplines regularly; they worked and they submitted to a hierarchical structure of authority. Communal monastic life, called cenobitism, also found root throughout Asia Minor. Basil of Caesarea, one of the Cappadocians mentioned earlier in the discussion of the trinitarian controversy, was an influential organizer and leader, even producing a set of rules. He emphasized the need for those in the monastery to minister to the needs of people in the towns and cities. Education, hospitality and medical care were viewed as corollaries of the contemplative life.

In the West, throughout Italy, modern-day France, Belgium, Germany and Spain, monastic communities and some hermitic ascetics practiced their

understanding of the spiritual life. The classical Western expression developed in the sixth century with Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*. Drawing from other monastic rules, Benedict composed his own list for his cenobite monastery in Monte Cassino, Italy. His *Rule* emphasized obedience to the communal leader (the abbot), balanced the ascetic life with communal charity and centered the monk's day around communal praise, manual labor and Bible reading. The monastery was not to be totally reclusive from society; it was also to provide a ministry of teaching.

The monastic movement must be understood in the context of the Christian quest for holiness, separation and discipleship. Often viewed by modern-day Christians with skepticism, monasticism continues to puzzle contemporary minds. This is unfortunate, for although perhaps somewhat extreme in some practices, Christian monasticism was fueled by a drive to be Christ's disciples, to enter victoriously into spiritual warfare and to flee from "friendship with the world" (Jas 4:4). In a way, monasticism replaced martyrdom as the supreme expression of discipleship. In a culture in which Christianity was now welcome and even sanctioned, Christians were no longer called to reject conformity to the religion and society of Rome but to reject conformity with a world grown complacent, presumptuous and casual about following Christ. The monks sought to imitate Christ in self-denial, an imitation for which their reading of Scripture helped prepare them.

Douglas Burton-Christie, an expert on the use of the Bible within the monastic movement, has described their attachment to the Bible in this way: "The Scriptures were experienced as authoritative words which pierced the hearts of the monks, illuminated them concerning the central issues of their lives, protected and comforted them during dark times of struggle and anxiety, and provided practical help in their ongoing quest for holiness." Burton-Christie cites the monk Antony, who told his students, "Whatever you *do* you should always *have* before you the testimony of Scripture."

To monastery residents, the Bible was not merely to be read; it was to be appropriated. For them, understanding had not occurred until the passage had been internalized, until transformation of life had taken place. When a monk obeyed the Scriptures, then he understood them.

The monks' commitment to silence and isolation was an attempt to obey Paul's command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17 KJV), even in manual labor. Such commitment was also an attempt to take seriously the Bible's teaching regarding care in speech, the destructive power of words, the inseparable connection between the heart and the tongue, the call to live out what one says one believes (Ps 39:1–2; Prov 18:21; Mt 12:33–34; 23:3). Silence was preferred to foolishness; a quiet tongue was preferred to a malicious one; the absence of speech in contemplation of holiness was far better than wicked words. They believed that

when a person's heart is bloated with evil, it is best for that person to keep his mouth closed.

The monks, however, were not naive about their practice of silence. The early church father Poemen agreed that silence was a wonderful virtue. "But," he cautioned, "people who hold their tongues should not always account themselves silent. If their minds are occupied with their neighbor's shortcomings, their silence is as bad as senseless chattering." In other words, we may not be speaking evil, but that doesn't mean we're not thinking evil.

The monks' renunciation of earthly possessions was biblically informed too. Renunciation imitated Christ and the disciples and followed Christ's teachings (Mt 4:20; 6:25–33; 8:18–22; 19:21, 27). The need for detachment from earthly goods is stated in a number of ways in the Scriptures. The psalmist wrote, "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you" (Ps 55:22). Paul stated, "We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Tim 6:7). Job affirmed, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21). So devoted were they to the Scriptures as the foundation of their spiritual lives that the monks under Benedict's *Rule* sang all 150 psalms every week!

Before we leave the monks, let's listen to several selections from their rich deposit of writings on the spiritual life:

> Two old men lived together for many years without a quarrel. One said to the other: "Let us have one quarrel with each other, as is the way of men." And

the other answered: “I do not know how a quarrel happens.” And the first said: “Look, I put a tile between us, and I say, That’s mine. Then you say, No, it’s mine. That is how you begin a quarrel.” So they put a tile between them, and one of them said: “That’s mine.” And the other said: “No, it’s mine.” And he answered: “Yes, it is yours. Take it away.” And they went away unable to argue with each other.

An old man said to a brother: “When a proud or vain thought enters you, examine your conscience to see if you are keeping God’s commandments; if you love your enemies; if you rejoice in your adversary’s triumph, and are grieved at his downfall; if you know yourself to be an unprofitable servant, and a sinner beyond all others. But not even then must you think yourself to have corrected all your faults; knowing that this thought alone in you shall undo all the other good you have done.”

Abba Hyperichius said: “The tree of life is lofty, and humility climbs in it.”

A Syrian solitary [a monk living as a hermit] came to him [Poemen] once lamenting the hardness of his heart. “Read the Word of God,” said Poemen; “the drip of a fountain pierces the stone, and the gentle word falling softly day by day on the dead hard heart after a while infallibly melts it.”

“What is a living faith?” was a question put to Poemen one day. “A living faith,” he answered, “consists in thinking little of oneself, and showing tenderness towards others.”

> Another of his [Poemen's] sayings: "A warm heart, boiling with charity to God and man, is not tormented with temptations; they swarm round a cold one. You see no flies hovering about the caldron boiling on the fire. Set it down and let it grow cold, and it is black with flies."

And from the *Rule of Saint Benedict* comes this statement about prayer: "If we want to ask a favor of any person of power, we presume not to approach but with humility and respect. How much more ought we to address ourselves to the Lord and God of all things with a humble and entire devotion? We are not to imagine that our prayers shall be heard because we use many words, but because the heart is pure and the spirit penitent."

The second part of this book, which treats the story of the church in the Middle Ages, or medieval period, will continue this glimpse into the history of Christian spirituality. We will see it in splendor and in darkness.

Part 2

Emeralds
The Church in the Middle Ages

Art reveals much about the values of a particular age. Let's take a tour of some symbols of the beliefs of some medieval Christians. First, as we enter a church, we encounter several woodcarvings on the ends of benches in the shape of battle shields. A commonplace in the Christian art of the Middle Ages, these shields reminded the faithful of the Passion of our Lord. On each shield is chiseled an emblem of the Passion narrative. On one is the crown of thorns; on another, the three nails; on a third, the hammer; the fourth holds the sponge on a rod; the fifth, the dice. As we walk through the church, continuing to glance at the benches, we see the spear, the whip, Judas's hand with a bag of silver, the cock that crowed. Our brothers and sisters in the Middle Ages never tired of telling the story of our Lord's betrayal, crucifixion and death. It was the basis of their salvation.

At another church we are held captive by the glasswork. Represented in the glass are acts of mercy taken from Jesus' words in Matthew 25:35–36. One depicts a believer feeding the hungry as he distributes bread from a basket. A second shows the same person

filling the bowls of the thirsty with water. Another shows a Christian holding clothes for five men who are without adequate covering. The last one represents three prisoners, feet in stocks, being visited by the benefactor. These artworks show what is best in medieval Christianity: a focus on the shame and suffering of Christ and the Christian duty to follow him in a life of merciful service to the needy.

As we saw in part one, the jewelers of the early church set and produced some lovely diamond pieces for our treasure collection of perspective building in our day. But believers in the Middle Ages, from 500 to about 1500, contributed fine emerald ornaments as well. Their concerns differed from those of the earlier church, but some practices were the same, such as self-denial in worship and discipleship.

People in the Middle Ages were faced with the problems that can occur when a “Christian culture” is confused with conversion of the heart, when institutions and hierarchies are confused with church and leadership, and when theology is of concern to the clergy but not the laity. But in the Middle Ages we can also gaze on brilliant examples of Christian leadership, prayer, the right use of the mind and the practice of the devotional life.

3 - Empires, Emperors & Pastors

In chapter two we briefly discussed the christological controversy, the Council of Chalcedon and monasticism of the fifth century. That century was a turbulent one for the Roman Empire. In that century the Germanic tribes invaded the empire, Rome was sacked and the Roman Empire fell.

Toward the end of the third century the Roman Empire was almost fragmented by German and Persian attacks. Then in the fourth and early fifth centuries the empire had to give attention to defending its many frontiers. In the south the frontiers extended across the Mediterranean Sea to the desert edges of North Africa. In the west the empire extended to the coasts of Portugal and Spain. In the north the empire extended across the English Channel to just above the river Tyne in England (exclusive of Scotland and Ireland). In central Europe the Roman Empire extended to the Danube and Rhine rivers in central and southeastern Europe (including Spain, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece). The Germanic tribes threatened this frontier. The eastern frontier, threatened by the Persians and Arabs, lay just east of the Black Sea, proceeding southward to enclose Syria, Israel and the Sinai Peninsula against the Mediterranean. And by the end of the fourth century (A.D. 395) the empire was divided between the two sons

of Theodosius I into the Western and Eastern Roman Empire, with the line of division running north to south between the heel of Italy and the western coast of Greece.

The Fall of the Empire, the Rise of a Christian Culture

Unable to protect all frontiers at once and experiencing inner turmoil, the Western empire weakened and so, almost by default, the Eastern portion gained strength. Then at the very end of 406 it happened: the Germanic invasion of the West began. Sometimes more migration than military conquest, the invasion involved different tribes of different character with different relations to Christianity. One tribe, the Vandals, who ended up finally in North Africa (around 430–533), also carried out the devastating sack of Rome in 455. The Ostrogoths made their way to Italy, where they ruled from 490 to 536. Another group, the Visigoths, sacked Rome in 410 and then proceeded to Spain, which they occupied until the Muslims claimed it at the beginning of the eighth century. The Franks occupied northern Gaul (France) from around 500, and in 532 they conquered the Burgundians, who had settled in southern Gaul. All these tribes, except the Franks, had embraced Christianity to some degree, holding to the Arian heresy. Looming in the future was the threat from the Arabs who, with the rise of Islam, eventually occupied Spain (starting about 711) and even probed into southern

France. Christianity in the West was intimidated by the Arabs and was fragmented by barbarians and Arians.

In such a world, missionary endeavors to the Germanic barbarians and Arians, as well as to those outside the Western continent, became both obedience to Christ's call and a political necessity. A ruler who was converted to orthodox Christianity might treat the conquered peoples more compassionately than others would. At times, regrettably, the gospel deteriorated into an argument for God's power over the pagan gods. Apparent conversions sometimes looked like that of Clovis, king of the Franks. In the midst of a battle that he was losing, Clovis cried out, "Christ Jesus.... I have invoked my own gods, and they have withdrawn from me.... Thee ... I [now] invoke; if Thou give me victory ... if I find in Thee power.... I will believe in Thee, and will be baptized in Thy name." Victory and material prosperity were seen as indicators of supernatural power.

This approach—assenting that the Christian God is superior to another god because of temporal, earthly blessings—was entirely at odds with humility and shame. It led some to true faith in Christ and others to a mere religious formalism. The latter merely embraced Christianity as a superior culture or power. This formalism increased as in future generations the idea of Christianity as a more beautiful and powerful society than the barbaric one became a more controlling notion. This seemed natural because the superior elements of Roman civilization accompanied the entrance of Christianity into various lands. With

Theodosius' naming of Christianity as the official religion, the sheer numbers of *apparent* conversions also contributed to such formalism.

This is a danger seen repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity. The dynamic works like this: A "Christian" culture develops with its own way of dressing, its own way of talking, its own art, its own music, its own everything. Over time, unfortunately, conforming to the "Christian" culture becomes confused with Christian conversion. If one becomes a member of the culture, practicing the distinctives of the group, one is acknowledged as converted, even if there has been no supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. Because of the union between Christianity and Roman civilization, at times it was difficult to tell the two apart.

The mass "conversion" of people in the early Middle Ages, along with the controlling idea of a society of the baptized, posed a problem for theologians and pastors: how explicitly did a baptized member of the church have to know and understand the Christian faith? It was assumed that baptism at infancy placed a person irretrievably among the faithful. The one baptized already possessed the essential component of "faith," and growth in explicit knowledge of the doctrines of the faith was not required. The essence of Christian identity had become inseparably linked to the baptism of infants; those who were baptized were viewed as having "implicit" faith although they might be ignorant of doctrinal particulars.

Pursuing knowledge and understanding of the faith was the task of churchmen, the theologians. The people, it was assumed, knew or should know the doctrines only roughly, and this they picked up in formal worship. This view of things introduced into Christian thinking the idea that doctrine or specific knowledge of important theological issues was the arena of theologians, not of "simple" laypersons. The simple folk had faith even if they didn't know or couldn't articulate what they believed. Church leaders reasoned that laypersons couldn't be expected to know theology.

John Calvin, hundreds of years in the future, would present a different view. He argued that faith has knowledge, not ignorance, for its foundation. Faith that obtains salvation *knows* God to be the merciful Father who reconciles us to himself through Christ, who is *known* as our righteousness. For Calvin, faith and understanding are joined.

Yes, in the Middle Ages the lines between politics and gospel, formalism and faith, society and church, culture and conversion became blurred at times. These tensions strained against each other repetitively, sometimes climactically. But within those blurred moments the spiritual life of the church continued. A tendency to criticize the church of the Middle Ages excessively may say more about our blindness to our own blurrings and tensions than anything else.

Despite the church's fumbles within a disintegrating world, believers during the medieval period still sought to live according to God's Word. "The Bible was the

most studied book of the Middle Ages. Bible study represented the highest branch of learning." So wrote Beryl Smalley in her acclaimed classic *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. And Benedicta Ward has written similarly, "Medieval devotion to God was based on the Latin Bible, the Sacred Scriptures, heard, read, or seen." We see evidence of this, for instance, in a sermon of one medieval Christian, Aelred of Rievaulx. Concerning the power of Scripture to console, he wrote, "Brothers, however cast down we may be by harassment or heartache, the consolations of Scripture will lift us up again, for all the things that were written in former days were written for our instruction so that we, through the steadfastness and encouragement the Scriptures give us, might have hope. I tell you, brothers, no misfortune can touch us, no situation so galling or distressing can arise that does not as soon as Holy Writ seizes hold of us, either fade into nothingness or become bearable."

Sadly, the central role of the Bible in the life of medieval believers has not always been recognized, and the Christianity of the medieval church has often been judged as decrepit and corrupted, as a religious view not built on reflection on the Bible. Certain abuses of the papacy, the Crusades, the struggles among emperor, king and pope, disease, war, invasion, aspects of suffocating sacramentalism and some unsatisfactory views on the doctrine of salvation have left most modern-day Protestants with a bad taste for medieval Christianity. For many Christians today, gloom,

superstition and vain piety, rather than joy, faith and love as fruit of the Spirit, seem to capture the essence of religious practice in that era. Thus we hear the popular yet pejorative nickname for the period: the Dark Ages.

But what were the lives of devoted believers actually like in the Middle Ages? What were they seeing in the Bible, and how was it influencing their life and worship?

Gregory the Great

Gregory I, also known as Gregory the Great, was elected from his quiet life as a monk to be the bishop of Rome, the pope, in 590. A skilled administrator and statesman, Gregory also possessed a vision faithful to the Great Commission. In the period of his papacy he pioneered successful missionary endeavors to Spain and England and meditated deeply on the Bible. Delighted yet humbled by Scripture, he said that it was "like a river, shallow and deep, in which lambs can walk and elephants swim." A man of enduring humility, pastoral sensitivity and moral strength, Gregory introduces us to Christian devotion in early medieval Europe. Bernard McGinn has noted, "As his *Moralia on Job* [a commentary on the moral life from the book of Job] shows, the pope's major concern was not with speculation on the metaphysical implications of Christianity, but with the practical application on belief in the great mysteries, especially of Christ and the church, for individual behavior."

We have already spoken of martyrdom in early Christianity and of the way in which early monasticism attempted to embrace martyrdom's emphasis on the life of discipleship. In some of his homilies Gregory helps us gain yet another perspective. Though a monk himself, Gregory preached in these homilies an understanding of martyrdom as "spiritual martyrdom," which he believed should be undertaken by all the faithful in times of peace. Concluding a sermon that recounted and honored the life of a mother whose seven sons fell to martyrdom, he told his audience, "Our Redeemer, dearly beloved, died out of love for us; let us learn to conquer ourselves out of love for him.… This is not a time of persecution, yet our peace also has its martyrdom. Even if we do not submit our necks to the metal sword, still we are putting to death the carnal desires in our hearts with a spiritual sword."

Putting to death carnality, which he called spiritual martyrdom, particularly involves love for others, both friends and enemies, and patience. This is because actual martyrdom requires these same virtues. Therefore, concerning love, Gregory preached this:

> No one is persecuting us to the point of death. How then can we prove that we love our friends? But there is something we should do during times of peace in the Church to make clear whether we are strong enough to die for the sake of our loving during times of persecution. John, the author of this gospel says: He who has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes the heart against him,

> how does God's love dwell in him? And John the Baptist says: Let him who has two tunics give to him who has none. Will a person, then, who will not give up his tunic for the sake of God during quiet times give up his life during a persecution? Cultivate the virtue of love in tranquil times by showing mercy, then, so that it will be unconquerable in times of disorder. Learn first to give up your possessions for almighty God, and then for yourself.

In speaking to the faithful about patience in light of the patient martyr Mennas, Gregory said these words: "If with the Lord's help we are striving to observe the virtue of patience, though we are living in a time of peace for the Church, yet we are holding the palm of martyrdom. There are in truth two kinds of martyrdom: one in the heart, the other in heart and action at the same time. And so we can be martyrs, even when we are not slain by anyone's sword. To die at the hands of a persecutor is unmistakably martyrdom; to bear insults, to love one who hates us, is martyrdom on our secret thought."

These writings show that the faithful devotion of the early martyrs, a devotion in imitation of Christ, continued to serve as a model for discipleship in times of peace. But besides providing a model for the monastics, Gregory's sermons show us that in the Middle Ages all believers were called to imitate Christ in the key virtues that undergird the commitment to actual death, namely, love and patience.

Gregory also had a rich concept of the ministerial office. Pastors, according to Gregory, were to preach so that their people embraced righteousness. In this spirit we can appreciate Gregory's various metaphors for preaching and for the preacher's listeners. Preaching is a rain that waters; it is arrows that pierce the listeners' hearts; it is sparks that burst into flame on the hearts they touch. Gregory likened the audience to the strings of a musical instrument. The preacher must play them, plucking them each differently, and must realize that his words will not fall the same way on each ear. For Gregory, eloquence in preaching stemmed not only from exegesis and rhetoric but also from the preacher's inner life, a humble, contemplative love for God and disdain for the world: "He who thinks about his own life inwardly and edifies others outwardly, instructing them by his own example, dips the pen of his tongue, as it were, in his heart, and writes outwardly with his hand in words for his neighbor." Furthermore, any teaching or homily was ultimately dependent on the Holy Spirit. Preaching on John 14:26, Gregory said, "It is justly promised that *'He will teach you all things,'* because unless the Spirit is present in the heart of a listener, the teacher's utterance is useless. No one should attribute to this teacher what he understands from him, because unless there is an inner teacher, the one outside is exerting himself in vain."

In Gregory's teaching, the holy man does not covet authoritarian control, but in service to God he shepherds the flock. Such leaders never feel secure from

the treachery of their evil yearnings. They are inwardly, authentically still and tranquil when chaos erupts. Instead of responding in anger to the hatred of enemies, they pray. They do not answer abuse with abuse. In adversity they are, with apparent naivetÈ, warm, sweet and simple.

In his classic *Book of Pastoral Rule*, Gregory outlined the characteristics he believed should mark the Christian minister. These characteristics are not penned by a Christian mind covered with gloom, as our stereotype of the Middle Ages would have it; rather, they are the words of one enlightened by Scripture.

> The ruler should always be pure in thought.
>
> The ruler should always be chief in action, that by his living he may point out the way of life to those that are put under him.
>
> The ruler should be discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech; lest he either utter what ought to be suppressed or suppress what he ought to utter.
>
> The ruler should be a near neighbor to every one in sympathy.
>
> The ruler should be, through humility, a companion of good livers, and through the zeal of righteousness, rigid against the vices of evildoers.
>
> The ruler also ought to understand how commonly vices pass themselves off as virtues.
>
> [The ruler should] be inspired by the spirit of heavenly fear and love [and] meditate daily on the precepts of Sacred Writ.

The Pope, the Church and the Ruler (Part 1)

As the kings and lords of the various territories in Europe converted to orthodox Christianity (usually followed in conversion by the lower classes whom they ruled), there developed, in the eighth and ninth centuries, a significant relationship between church and ruler. The ruler had complete control over lands and property, and being Christian, he felt obligated to provide a parish for his people. The ruler was therefore the authority over the parish, and the area over which he exercised jurisdiction was a spiritual community. Informed by the Old Testament concept of kingship, which unified civil, military and religious offices, the Germanic kings became central to the church. The just king was expected to defend strangers, chastise adulterers, protect churches, cherish the poor with alms, trust God in all things, believe in God according to the catholic (one, true, universal) faith and attend to prayers at the hours fixed. If a king failed in this calling, then on the basis of the story of Solomon's fall and the split of his kingdom (1 Kings 11:11–13), the king was warned that he might experience the enslavement of his people, deaths of loved ones, enemy invasions, destruction of herds and flocks, disasters from the weather and the end of his dynasty.

The bishops, too, rose in power because of the lack of local stability left by the Roman Empire's disintegration. They represented God, and the people recognized them as leaders. Not all of them, however, lived godly lives. Some were greedy and had attained

their diocese through purchase. Others demanded payment for their ministry and lived in immorality. Such corruption led to decline in the laity's interest in spiritual things. Nevertheless, bishops served as feudal lords, as spiritual guides and priests, and as advisers to kings. They owned real estate and exercised some control over public opinion. They were responsible to fulfill their feudal duties to the king. Rulers, however, found themselves also in submission to the bishops. As a ruler, the king appointed his bishop. Yet as a Christian (and at times a wise politician), the king bowed to the bishop and was crowned by him. Following the Old Testament practice of anointing kings, the act of coronation enhanced the authority of both kings and church. Ultimately, however, it delivered to medieval Christianity the notion of Christendom as a unity of the secular and the sacred, the civil and the ecclesial.

A central moment in this relationship came on Christmas Day, 800, when Pope Leo III crowned the king of France—Charles the Great, or Charlemagne (ca. 742–814)—as the Roman (Western) emperor. Two events precipitated this act: Charlemagne had accumulated extensive dominions in the west and the pope had promised to protect Charlemagne. The coronation recognized Charlemagne's achievements and sealed the pope's promise. Because of the coronation, Charlemagne, as the recognized protector of the church, its guardian and benefactor, experienced a new depth of unity between church and ruler. Charlemagne took his responsibility to the church seriously and instituted

quality control within clerical offices and monasteries and eradicated heresy. Charlemagne saw the clergy as the foundation to a society that existed for the service of God.

Such an interest in quality control within the monasteries was necessary in the ninth century and even more so in the tenth. Laxity and corruption, often connected to the monks' involvement in civil affairs and their integration into the feudal political system, entered monasteries more and more. The secular and the temporal increasingly interfered with the spiritual and the eternal. The Benedictine rule came to be honored less and less. This was harmful not only to the monasteries but also to the laity they served. As Vivian Greene has aptly stated, "For the laity the monastery was above all the power-house of prayer, its Masses and its daily offices a continuous chain of petition to God." And this was the case for the entire society, not just the lower classes.

Kings even viewed monasteries as being "less centers of private religious exercise, than centers of public intercession and prayer" to serve the whole community. While people worked the fields, the monks prayed for the workers' harvest. While the king governed and defended the kingdom, the monks prayed for security and peace. But this praying didn't occur if the monks were carousing.

Happily, wide-reaching reform took place in and through the monastery of Cluny in Burgundy, where strict observance of the Benedictine rule was restored

and lay, secular rule was absent. It was under the sole supervision of ecclesiological authorities. Through the tenth and eleventh centuries a renaissance of spiritual discipline spread from Italy to Spain as other monasteries, with Cluny, returned to what they understood as the ideals of the early church. Celibacy and purity were restored, prayer was recaptured, worship was revived and lay secular supervision was rescinded. At the beginning of the next chapter, we will see what the monks' practice of prayer looked like. And we will continue our survey of Christian life and devotion in the Middle Ages.

4 - Medieval Lessons on Prayer, Thinking & Devotion

A true monk embraced a vision of the spiritual life in anticipation of the life to come. It was a life lived in tension between temporary existence in the present world and an indifference toward it. He envisioned himself as dead to the world and a despiser of earthly things, and though not a member of the majority of believers, he served the earthly community by his vision and set standards for it. The monastic way of life created conditions under which the monk could live in accord with the Lord's teaching to his disciples.

Monasticism and Prayer

Jesus' teachings on prayer (such as Luke 18:1: "they should always pray and not give up") and other scriptural commands concerning prayer were foremost in the monks' minds. We see this in the earliest moments of monastic history with the famous monk Antony. Athanasius of Alexandria tells us that Antony "prayed often, for he had learned that one should pray to the Lord without ceasing" (see 1 Thess 5:17). Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, "We must not devote ourselves to prayer once or twice, but frequently, diligently, letting God know the longings of our hearts and letting him hear, at times, the voice of

our mouth. This is why it is said, 'Let your petitions be made known to God, (Phil 4:6)' which happens as a result of persistence and diligence in prayer."

The populace valued the monk's lifestyle because through it other biblical teaching came to life. Through the intercessory prayer of a monk they embraced the words of James 5:16: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." For instance, in a letter to the abbot Hugo of Cluny, Henry III petitioned Hugo to become his son's godfather: "Which man who knows the right way would not hope for your prayers and those of your monks? Who would not strive to hold fast to the indissoluble bond of your love, you whose prayer is all the purer in that it is remote from worldly deed, all the worthier in that it is near to God's sight?"

If you have ever gone to a brother or sister in Christ, seeking that person's prayer support because of what you know about his or her purity and faithful prayer life, you understand Henry's viewpoint. The confidence and peace you had as a result of sharing your need with the brother or sister was the same sense of security the monks offered. Intercessory prayer, then, was central to the monk's ministry. In this way they ministered to the community and carried out part of their pastoral service. And this was part of the monk's focus: service. Following is the story of one such monk, Columba.

An Irishman's wife of the sixth century had taken an aversion to her husband (probably for good reason). When she went to the monk Columba for counsel, he

reminded her of the Bible's teaching on the permanence of marriage.

She replied, "I am ready to do everything—except live with him." She said she would be faithful to her domestic responsibilities. She said she would even leave for a convent. But she would not dwell with that man another minute!

The wise Columba replied that a convent was out of the question so long as her husband was alive. "But," he added, "let us fast and pray—you, your husband, and myself."

"Oh," said the woman, "I know that you can obtain even what is impossible from God."

All three then fasted, and Columba spent the entire night alert and awake in prayer. The next morning he gently approached the woman and with tender irony asked her to which convent she had decided to flee.

"To none," she replied. "My heart has been changed tonight. I know not how I have passed from hate to love." From that day on she lived with her husband lovingly and faithfully.

In the monks' daily routine there were many scheduled times of prayer; the first time was at dawn. Their prayers demonstrated a deep dependence on God's grace, a confession of their mortality and a healthy fear of sin. Although they recited the majority of the liturgies in Latin, there exists an old English liturgy from around the tenth century. Note the poetic imagery of sun, illumination and darkness, which reflects on the

light of the new day, and its overwhelming concern for purity:

> In the first hour of the day, that is at the sun's rising, we should praise God and eagerly pray him that he, out of his tenderness of heart, illumine our hearts with the illumination of the true Sun—that is, that he by his grace so illumine our inward thought that the devil may not through harmful darkness lead us astray from the right path nor too much impede us with the snares of sin. Be, Lord God, a noble helpmate; look, Lord, upon me, and help me quickly then in my mortal need.

Such a beginning to each new day has scriptural support. David and the sons of Korah did something similar:

> Give ear to my words, O LORD,
> consider my sighing.
> Listen to my cry for help,
> my King and my God,
> for to you I pray.
> In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
> in the morning I lay my request before you
> and wait in expectation. (Ps 5:1–3)

> I cry to you for help, O LORD;
> in the morning prayer comes before you. (Ps 88:13)

The Features of Monastic Prayer: Brevity, Purity and Constancy

What did the practice of early and medieval monastic prayer look like? From Scripture the monks determined that their prayers should be pure, brief, frequent and nurtured through the reading of Scripture. Since even in a monastery (let alone the rat race of the twenty-first century) distractions could be frequent (interruptions, wandering of the mind, worries, drowsiness), prayer done alone and in common with other monks was to be short in duration. The *Rule* of Saint Benedict says, "We are not to imagine that our prayers shall be heard because we use many words, but because the heart is pure and the spirit penitent. Therefore prayer must be short and pure, unless a feeling of divine inspiration prolong it. Prayer in common ought always be short, and when the sign is given by the superior [abbot], all should rise together."

This calls to mind Jesus' words in Matthew 6:7–8: "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." The monks' belief that prayer was to be simple and short helped prevent their praying from becoming meaningless periods of gab that went on and on and caused thoughts to drift. Benedict wanted prayer times to be periods of attentiveness and freshness. This was taken seriously, for human frailty was a constant threat to purity in prayer. The monk had

to know himself and his weaknesses so as not to abuse the sacred trust of prayer. Columbanus, an Irish monk who ministered in France and Italy during the late sixth and early seventh centuries, gave the following advice: "The authentic tradition concerning prayer is that the possibilities of the man consecrated to this work be fulfilled without his getting tired of it. One must keep in mind his possibilities, as well as his mental powers and physical condition. His limitations must be taken into consideration and his possibilities realized according as the measure or fervor of each one requires." Commenting on the *Rule* of Saint Benedict (20), Hildemar wrote on the same principle that "we ought to remain recollected in prayer only during the time that we can, by God's help, remain free of vain thoughts. As soon as we realize that we are being overcome by temptations, and that we do not find delight in prayer, we should arise and return to reading or the recitation of the Psalter or to work."

For the monk, proper attentiveness was crucial in prayer because virtuous prayer was prayer that was unceasingly holy. Such prayer was focused upon eternity, upon others, upon God's thoughts. In the *Conferences* of Cassian the Egyptian abbot, Isaac, speaking of such purity in prayer, said, "The author of eternity would have us ask nothing ephemeral, nothing paltry, nothing transient. He who neglects these petitions for eternity and prefers to ask for the evanescent, insults the generous majesty of God; meanness in prayer offends the judge instead of

propitiating him." Unceasing prayer, then, was not just constant praying; it signified a type of prayer—godly prayer.

The Pastoral Prayer of Abbot Aelred, leader of the Christian abbey of Rievaulx in Northumbria (ca. 1150), is such a prayer. It is oriented upon the eternal. Following is a glimpse (from that writing) into his remarkable life of prayer.

As leader of the monastery, Aelred was awed by the responsibility, humbled by his office. He began by referring to himself as a "wretchful, unfit bungler of a shepherd," contrasting himself with Jesus, "O good shepherd (John 10:11, 14)." He puzzled over why God had placed him in his position as abbot, and before he dared to pray for those under his care, he confessed his sins—a "sacrifice of prayer." Scarred from past sins, guilty of present iniquity and certain of future failures (all of which he knew God saw), he uttered quietly and confidently, "Look well at me, sweet Lord, look well. I place my hope in your compassion." Glancing back at Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 1:10, where David's son prayed not for riches but for wisdom to rule, Aelred pleaded to God for wisdom, saying, "Send her [wisdom] forth, O fount of wisdom, from the throne of your glory that she may … order the thoughts and words and all my deeds and counsel."

He told the Lord that he wished to "be holy and utterly employed and expended" for those under his care. Here was a man consumed with his pastoral charge. He then asked to be taught by the Holy Spirit in

the following areas: being patient with the frail; sympathizing kindly; supporting tactfully; consoling the sad; strengthening the fainthearted; raising the fallen; being weak with the weak; being indignant with those who have been scandalized; chiding the restless; comforting the timid; sustaining the weak; adapting himself to various temperaments, characters, feelings and degrees of intelligence or simplicity; and speaking words that would build up in faith, hope, love, sexual purity, humility, patience and obedience (compare 1 Cor 9:22; 13:13; 2 Cor 11:29; Eph 4:29).

In the final part of his prayer Aelred asked God to unify those under his charge in peace, to build them up in faith, to strengthen them against temptation and trial, and to free them from vices that would deter them from faithfulness (compare Mt 6:13; Eph 4:3). Near the end of his prayer he said warmly, "You know, sweet Lord, how much I love them, how my heart goes out to them and melts for them." Here is a shepherd after the Shepherd's own heart, one consumed with the Christian growth of his charges, their life in the Spirit. He closed by petitioning the Lord to "cheer the depressed, fan the lukewarm into flame, and reinforce the wavering."

Another stunning example is Anselm's *Prayer for Enemies*. Besides praying the words of Scripture, he also prayed, as Scripture commanded him to pray, after the words of Jesus, "You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Mt

5:43–45). In his prayer for those who had persecuted him we find the prayers of a mature Christian heart: a heart that admitted its tendency to hate in return; a heart that needed the intervention of God to love; a heart that sought eternal blessings for his foes; a heart that recognized its own scandalous nature.

> I can begin nothing good without you,
> neither can I bring anything to fruition
> nor maintain it, without you.…
>
> You, who are true light, lighten their darkness;
> You, who are whole truth, correct their errors;
> You, who are true life, give life to their souls.…
>
> Tender Lord Jesus,
> let me not be the cause of the death of my brothers,
> let me not be to them
> a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.
> For it is more than enough, Lord,
> that I should be a scandal to myself,
> my sin is sufficient to me.

Here, in Aelred and Anselm, are two examples of maturity and purity in prayer.

Brevity aided such purity. So 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and 1 Timothy 2:8 go together, as Isaac reminds us: "St. Paul's words were: 'Pray without ceasing,' and 'In every place lifting up pure hands without wrath and controversy.' To obey this is impossible, unless the mind is purified from sin, is given to virtue as its natural good, and is continually nourished by the contemplation of God." And once again: "He prays too little, who only

prays when he is on his knees. But he never prays, who while on his knees is in his heart roaming far afield."

But besides being brief and therefore attentive and pure, the monks' prayers were to be frequent. Like studying for an exam or memorizing a poem, many short, concentrated periods are better than a few drawn-out, disjointed ones. Though these dedicated men prayed short prayers, they prayed many times each day. Their praying was "without ceasing," that is, frequent. Their day typically would begin about 2:00 a.m. in winter or 3:00 a.m. in the summer. Prayer at the first hour (6:00 a.m.) was followed by prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours, for which the monks interrupted their labor, and then evening prayer. It was not strange, however, for monks to practice prayer after what they understood as the manner of David (Ps 119:164). This would involve seven periods of prayer, including the middle of the night and before dawn.

Prayer, of course, also accompanied work and meals and the weekly, longer liturgical services. "Pray without ceasing," then, also meant praying continually in all daily involvement. Douglas Burton-Christie relates a wonderful story from the early desert monks:

> This story concerns some Euchites [a heretical sect], who went to see Abba Lucious. When Lucious asked them about their work, they replied, "We do not touch manual work but as the Apostle says, we pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)." Lucious was dubious about this reply and pressed his visitors to elaborate. He asked them whether they ever ate or slept. They

replied that they did. Lucious then asked how they prayed when they were eating or sleeping, but they could not find an answer to give him. Seeing this, he said to them, in language which expressed the depth of their misunderstanding of the biblical text, "Forgive me but you do not act as you speak." Lucious then proceeded to show them how, while doing his manual work, he prayed without ceasing. He told them: "I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes and saying to God, 'have mercy on me … save me from my sins.' "

Bible Reading and Meditation

Monastic prayer was also united with the reading of the Bible. For many monks it was difficult to separate the two, for prayer was prayerful reading. In this spirit Arnoul of BohÈriss wrote, "When he reads, let him seek for savor, not science. The Holy Scripture is the well of Jacob from which the waters are drawn which will be poured out later in prayer. Thus there will be no need to go to the oratory [spoken prayer] to begin to pray; but in reading itself, means will be found for prayer and contemplation."

Reading the Bible encouraged prayer, nurtured sacred thinking, helped the monks think correctly about God and themselves. Fragmenting one's devotional life into separate functions such as Bible study time, meditation and prayer time is largely a modern invention. But monks wed them as different aspects of

one act. In his worshipful theological work *Meditation on Human Redemption*, Anselm (1033–1109) wrote:

> Consider again the strength of your salvation and where it is found. Meditate upon it, delight in the contemplation of it. Shake off your lethargy and set your mind to thinking over these things. Taste the goodness of your Redeemer, be on fire with love for your Savior. Chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavor which is sweeter than sap, swallow their wholesome sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Be glad to chew, be thankful to suck, rejoice to swallow.

For Anselm, sacred reading "was an action of the whole person, by which the meaning of a text was absorbed, until it became prayer." Reading the Bible in prayer involved what the monks often spoke of as rumination—a meditative, reflective thinking or contemplation. Such reading could be slow, but that was okay. So deep and thorough was the rumination of some monks that they memorized great portions of the Bible. One such monk, the thirteenth-century Antony of Padua, was said to have known almost the entire Bible by heart. This ability caused Gregory IX to refer to him as "the Ark of the Covenant." By that, he meant that much as the ark held the tablets of the law of Moses, Antony retained "the whole of Scripture in his memory."

The Psalms attracted the monks the most, although they weren't hesitant about reading all the Scriptures and even commentaries on them. Through such contemplative reading their prayers ultimately became

citations or paraphrases of Scripture, and through memorization unceasing prayer became more possible. Their mouths uttered and their minds presented to God what was in their hearts. It was not enough simply to keep the appointed times of prayer, as Epiphanius, the bishop of Cyprus, relates: “The true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in his heart.” For this reason memorization of the Psalter was a regular requirement of the monastic life. Recitation of the Psalms to aid prayer could reach astounding measures, with a few monks reciting the entire Psalter. Although some degrees of recitation seem severe, it was aimed at uniting the heart, tongue and mind in prayer. The Scripture was the fountain of all practice for the monk, and it supplied every avenue to spirituality. Epiphanius said, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is a precipice and a deep abyss.” Antony said every monk should heed this teaching: “Whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures.” Reading, memorizing and reciting the Scriptures led to purity in prayer, for one prayed after the mind of God as one began to personally own the biblical revelation and to utter it back to God.

Monastic prayer, in its unity with Bible reading, has three phases forming a unified practice. The first phase is *lectio*, or reading. This is a practice devoted to the reading of Holy Scripture or helpful explanations of it from within the church. The focus is upon literature that is sacred, divine in origin, so it is called *lectio divina*. Joined to the first phase is the second term, *meditatio*,

or meditation. *How* one reads is critical to both *lectio* and *meditatio*. Seeing the words on the page is not sufficient. One must use the mouth, pronouncing the words, owning them in both mind and body. Thus, when the monks speak of hearing the Scriptures, this is not merely a figure of speech for silent reading. It emphasizes the vocal aspect of monastic reading. It is this vocal recitation, done repetitively, that leads to memorization of the Bible and the beginning of internalization. Note these emphases within early monasticism on the regular repetition of Scripture, leading to memorization and then purity:

> There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the Scriptures. [One should learn by heart] at least the New Testament and the Psalter.
>
> Let us devote ourselves to reading and learning the Scriptures, reciting them continually, aware of the text, "A man shall be filled with the fruit of his own mouth" (Prov 13:2).… Consider by how many testimonies the word of the Lord urges us to recite the Holy Scriptures that we may possess through faith what we have repeated with our mouth.

The final phase is *oratio*, or prayer. It is last because it is founded on the first two. Reading and meditation must lead to response or they are incomplete, inauthentic. Reading and meditation do not exist in and of themselves for the monk; they serve prayer. *Lectio divina* and *meditatio* are slow, reflective and repetitive.

The monks follow Jesus' own pattern of repetition in prayer of the same words (Mt 26:44) as the words of Scripture inform and even become their own prayer. Leclercq helpfully defines monastic prayer from this viewpoint. It is "our placing our voice in harmony with the voice of God in the Church and in ourselves, in harmonizing our voice with his." This happens only as the Bible accompanies prayer.

A premier example of this is in Anselm's *Prayer to Christ*, in which one hears echoes of at least five psalms. Let's steal a glimpse of this Christian leader in humble, tearful prayer.

> Most kind lover of men,
> "the poor commits himself to you,
> for you are the helper of the orphan" [Ps 10:14].
> My most safe helper,
> have mercy upon the orphan left to you.
> I am become a child without a father;
> my soul is like a widow.…
> "My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs after you" [Ps 63:1; 42:2].
> My soul thirsts for God, the fountain of life;
> "when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" [Ps 42:2].
> My consoler, for whom I wait, when will you come?
> O that I might see the joy that I desire;
> that I might be satisfied with the appearing of your glory for which I hunger;
> that I might be satisfied with the riches of your house for which I sigh;
> that I might drink of the torrent of your pleasures

for which I thirst [Ps 36:8].

The language of Scripture had become Anselm's prayer language. He had assimilated God's Word into his very speech; his mind was so saturated with it that he spoke back to God what God had spoken to him.

Intimacy, Doctrine and Godly Awareness

As we draw this discussion of monasticism and prayer to a close, I would like us to see three final aspects of the monks' prayer life.

First, the monks viewed prayer as the treasured occasion of being humbly and gratefully the loved creature before the Creator. Prayer was something desired, something demanding the closing of some doors in order to open the door into prayer. Prayer desperately sought intimacy with God, and prayer began with confession of sin and finiteness and moved into a humble confidence about God's infiniteness and mercy. Note these words by Anselm:

> Come now, little man,
> turn aside for a while from your daily employment,
> escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts.
> Put aside your weighty cares,
> let your burdensome distractions wait,
> free yourself awhile for God
> and rest awhile in him.
> [Your servant] longs to see you,
> but your countenance is too far away....
> How wretched is the fate of man

when he lost that for which he was created....
Adam [before the Fall] was so full he belched, we are so hungry
we sigh;
he had abundance, and we go begging....

Alas, I am indeed wretched,
one of those wretched sons of Eve,
separated from God!...
Lord, I am so bent I can only look downwards,
raise me, that I may look upwards.
My iniquities have gone over my head,
they cover me and weigh me down like a heavy burden....

Ah, from what generous love and loving generosity
compassion follows out to us!

Ah, what feelings of love should we sinners have
towards the unbounded goodness of God!...
I was seeking God,
and I have found that he is above all things,
and that than which nothing greater can be thought.

Second, in Anselm and in many others we see hardly any distinction between a robust theology and devotion, between head and heart, doctrine and practical piety, knowledge and prayer. The prayers of earlier monks were nurtured on and reflected a foundation of definite belief in orthodox doctrines. One who prayed purely did not pray with mere sentimentality. Prayer was not an occasion for informality with the Judge and Creator of the universe. One was obligated to believe correctly about God and his relationship to creation. Such belief,

then, was to find expression in theologically correct prayer. Purity in prayer began with believing the theology held and taught by the church. Prayer was an opportunity to enter into a deeper understanding of the church's faith. Two of Anselm's greatest theological treatises, *Meditation on Human Redemption* and *Proslogion*, it is important to note, are prayers. Read with me his tender, profound reflection upon the mysterious death of Christ, the God-man:

> There is something mysterious in this abjection. O hidden strength: a man hangs on a cross and lifts the load of eternal death from the human race; a man nailed to wood looses the bonds of everlasting death that hold fast the world. O hidden power: a man condemned with thieves saves men condemned with devils, a man stretched out on the gibbet draws all men to himself. O mysterious strength: one soul coming forth from torment draws countless souls with him out of hell, a man submits to the death of the body and destroys the death of souls.... See, Christian soul, here is the strength of your salvation, here is the cause of your freedom, here is the price of your redemption. You were a bond-slave and by this man you are free. By him you are brought back from exile, lost, you are restored, dead, you are raised.

Finally, prayer was an enduring awareness of God. It might await set times for communal or private expression, but it was ultimately a constant discipline of meditation upon one's finitude in light of God's immensity. To aid this enduring awareness, some monks

adopted biblical texts that expressed their state in numerous specific instances. Abbot Isaac was one of these. Psalm 70:1—"O God, make speed to save me; O LORD, make haste to help me"—was for him a text that fit "every mood and temper of human nature, every temptation, every circumstance. It contains an invocation of God, a humble confession of faith, a reverent watchfulness, a meditation upon our frailty, a confidence in God's answer, an assurance of his ever-present support. The man who continually invokes God as his guardian, is aware that he is continually at hand." Each believer needed to cling to this passage. When one felt gluttonous, when one was weak about reading the Bible, when a temptation came softly, when anger welled up, when pride crept in, when wandering thoughts interrupted prayer, when one thought stumbling was unlikely, the prayer must be sincerely spoken.

Anselm's biographer, Eadmer, and Anselm himself tell us that his prayers were written to benefit others in their prayer lives. This monk, who was also a theologian, delivered his prayers to help the people enter into transforming conversations with Almighty God. As Eadmer expressed it, "I hope that [the reader's] heart will be touched and that he will feel the benefit of them [the prayers] and rejoice in them and for them."

The Pope, the Church and the Ruler (Part 2)

Early in the thirteenth century the papacy attained a level of authority, efficiency and organization never before known. Pope Gregory VII (1073−1085) claimed papal authority in the temporal, secular arena as well as the spiritual, ecclesiastical realm. Then papal power reached its height in Pope Innocent III (1198−1216). Innocent III claimed that even kings and nobles derived their authority from the pontiff. Not all rulers recognized or submitted to this view, and the disagreements between some royals and popes make for some of the most intriguing stories in medieval history. And yet the pope, as the supposed descendant of the apostle Peter and as head of the church, received the undying faithfulness of many rulers.

In exercising this authority the church of the Middle Ages became a sophisticated administrative organization. More involvement in civil and political decisions, struggles with rulers, territorial claims, even the development and employment of an army increased the papacy's complex bureaucracy. Such complexity and entanglement with secular, civil and political concerns resulted in a blurring of the church's pilgrim identity and its focus on the Great Commission. The emphasis on ecclesiastical office and clergy resulted in an increased separation between clergy and laity. Theology and spirituality became more and more the exclusive functions of the clergy. In the fourteenth century the papal structure, contrary to the assertions of Pope Boniface VIII in 1301 and 1302, began to lose the

prominence over secular rulers it had earlier enjoyed. Kings and nobles became less sensitive to papal edicts, and at times papal methods of control became less than honorable, more in keeping with worldly rather than heavenly pursuits.

The institutional church's orientation toward the earthly can also be seen in its Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The earthly, of course, was the Holy Land, which had been occupied by Muslims for several hundred years. The land of redemptive events and revelation, inhabited by the faithful of Islam, was a stone in the shoes of the papacy, the Christian kings and much of the populace of Western Europe. Promised spiritual reward for reclaiming the land for Christianity was a great motivator for the devout. Others, however, found interest in the promise of adventure and captured wealth. Ultimately the Christian goals failed and distracted the church from its more noble duties. The sword and the lance rarely contributed to anyone's being salt and light.

It was in the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204) that a relationship already characterized by miserable fracture and division received further insult. In 1054 the Western Roman Church, represented by delegates sent by Pope Leo IX, excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, the head of the Eastern church. Patriarch Cerularius had refused to acknowledge Rome's supremacy over the Eastern church and, in response to Rome's act, he excommunicated the pope's delegation. This great schism had been anticipated for centuries due

to language differences (Latin versus Greek), disagreement over the place of icons in worship, territorial disputes, variant beliefs concerning celibacy and clerical office, and arguments regarding the Holy Spirit's procession (the Eastern church said the Spirit proceeded only from the Father, while the Western church said he proceeded from both the Father and the Son). The dark act of 1204 was the sacking of Constantinople by Western crusaders. Only after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) did serious reconciliation between the Western and Eastern churches begin. In 1965 the sentences of excommunication were removed in Jerusalem at a meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras.

Scholasticism

In the midst of the institutional development of the church and its wars, the thirteenth century also gave birth to a particular emphasis in the method of doing theology. Known as Scholasticism, this approach began with the doctrines the church already held as indispensable and sought to explain them by combining reason, faith, Scripture and tradition. The Scholastics—those who engaged in this endeavor—worked hard at thinking through what they already held by faith. They labored to find a meeting place for trust and knowledge, belief and reason. They desired to serve the church by

setting a table where faith and understanding dined joyously together.

Ultimately these theologians believed that "Christian theology … is not naked faith, but faith invested by grace with reason and imagination." Spirituality, life in the Spirit of God, was not to be viewed as a pious, hopeful wish in something basically irrational and unreasonable. Rather, spirituality involved thinking as much as feeling, pondering as much as sensing, brain work as much as willing, head as much as heart. New doctrine was not their interest. They were not attracted to novelty. Neither did they think they could or should erase all mystery from faith. What they did concentrate on was enlarging the church's mental growth in the faith so that one didn't just say the creed in blind, ambiguous "faith" but appreciated its depths, its implications, its riches. Scholastic theologians attempted to explain the reasonableness of the creed. They explained *why* the church's beliefs made good sense. One shouldn't say "I believe that the Son is one essence with the Father" as if it is nonsense and as if there is a super-spirituality in believing poppycock. Instead, while saying the creed, one should rejoice that the Son is divine, worshiping the Son together with the Father and determining not to confuse the person of the Son with the person of the Father.

Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest medieval Scholastic, said we do not employ reason to test, try or prove faith. Rather, sacred doctrine "uses human reasoning … to make manifest some implications of its

[faith's] message.... Natural reason should assist faith." In other words, reason or rational argumentation is not the authority that ultimately renders a verdict in favor of faith. Rather, reason assists faith by helping us grasp its reasonableness and its significance. But reason never substitutes for revelation or faith. As Anselm said, "Lord I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding is no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand."

The Scholastic theologians help us recall Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37–38: "Love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind*. This is the first and the greatest commandment" (italics added).

Most of us are more familiar with moral virtue than we are with the virtue of the intellect. The Scholastics would all emphasize the importance of qualities such as charity, humility, faithfulness, generosity and self-control. But they believed that other qualities were essential to Christianity as well. These included perception, comprehension, understanding, wisdom, truthfulness and discernment. According to the Scholastics, regenerate, Spirit-indwelt human beings were to engage their minds. Thinking well was integral to being well. They considered the opposites of the intellectual virtues (foolishness, senselessness, delusion,

fallaciousness, error, inaccuracy, miscalculation, disorientation, derangement) as dishonorable traits. Because of this they saw the mind as the fount of morality. Paul exhorted the Romans to practice the virtues of humility (in light of spiritual gifts), including love, joy, patience, faithfulness, hospitality, blessing, peace and goodness (Rom 12:3–21). However, before Paul launched into this list of qualities, he gave this command: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed *by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (12:2, italics added). Here is the spirit of the Scholastics.

It is not strange, then, that the rise of the university occurred along with this medieval focus upon intellectual virtues. Birthed at the end of the twelfth century, medieval universities began as scholars associated with each other and their students. They gathered themselves into educational bodies, groups or universities. Bologna, Paris and Oxford numbered among the most famous early locations.

Mysticism in the Late Middle Ages

In the late Middle Ages (1300–1500) some Christians reacted against the constricting institutionalism of the church and what was perceived as a numbing intellectualism within Scholasticism. These reactions would largely take place on the fringes of institutional church life among ordinary people, who searched hungrily for spiritual vitality, piety and the authenticity

of an interior, personal, individual life with God. Spiritual writings in the languages of these hungry souls began to appear, and a great sensitivity to hypocrisy in Christian practice developed.

As the search for the authentic spiritual life outside the institution and intellect gained ground, a mystical orientation to the devotional life emerged. As always happens in reactions, especially those that emphasize the individual and the private to the neglect of the traditional and communal, some of these people were heretical. When you fail to take into account the orthodoxy held by the church in the past and go off on your own, you are prone to wander. But not all these pilgrims in search of spiritual authenticity rebelled against the institution and sought separation from it. Others, more calmly and with reflection, sought rather to restore it to an earlier purity. Where some remained within the institution, seeking to impart renewed meaning and life to traditional practices and symbols, others revolted against what they perceived as vain formalities.

Monks and laypersons alike, in a quest for the soul's transformation, entered into a search for the devotional life. Each hungered for deep personal piety, a more personal encounter with Jesus, spiritual perfection, integrity in repentance and enlightenment and growth through prayer. In many cases there were visions and intense asceticism. Sensations, they believed, also sometimes measured authentic spirituality.

The heretical mystics who ultimately substituted inner experience for outward religious authority viewed themselves as divine, they rejected anything physical or external as unspiritual and they held themselves free from church or moral law. The most popular streams of mysticism, however, emphasized inspirational experiences and feelings that reflected intense, immediate, inner contact with God and found some harmony between the mind and the heart. In many ways the mysticism of the late Middle Ages was an exercise in spirituality, a practice of private reflection and prayer in the shadow of institution and intellect.

Themes common to medieval mystics were detachment from self and the world, selflessness, and the experience of the fullness of God. Mystical souls craved intimacy and fellowship with God. They longed for a temporal taste of the presence of God in their souls, a momentary, experiential awareness of God's presence unobscured by sin and darkness. An ecstatic love for God, usually identified with ecstatic joy, was the destination of the mystics' journey. They wanted to feel themselves as nothing and God as everything.

The Song of Solomon was a favorite text for contemplating the soul's sublime knowledge of God. The mystics viewed the book as presenting a spiritual marriage between the individual soul and God as well as between the church and Christ. These believers wanted to lean on Jesus' breast (Jn 13:23, 25) and to rest under the comforting wings of Jesus, in contrast to stubborn Jerusalem (Lk 13:34). This relationship could also be

viewed in terms of the promised abode for the Father and Son within the believer (Jn 14:23). It stood out against the backdrop of the many New Testament passages that speak of the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer's body (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; see also Rom 5:5). Along with Peter's statement that believers are participants in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), these passages encouraged the mystics to seek to experience more fully a union that already existed by grace. They identified with the psalmist's words that "my flesh and heart may fail, but God is … my portion forever" (Ps 73:26). Recognizing that, like Paul, each of them was "a wretched man," desperately in need of delivery from the "body of death," the mystics thirsted for a conscious oneness with God.

The writings of some medieval mystics are quite inspirational and instructive. We would be poorer in our devotional literature without them.

Although not a late medieval spiritual author, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090−1153) tuned the strings that others later would play. In his text entitled *On the Love of God* he began with the following statement: "You wish me to tell you why God should be loved, and in what way or measure we should love him. I answer then: the reason for our loving God *is* God; and measure of that love there should be none.… God is not loved without reward, although he should be loved without reward in view. True charity [love] is never left with empty hands; and yet she is no hireling, out of pay, but 'seeketh not her own' [1 Cor 13:5]."

Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), a late medieval mystic, wrote in his *On Solitude and the Attainment of God* how we are to think of God. In this writing he emphasized that if time and place control our thoughts of God, if we differentiate between the sacred locations and moments on the one hand and the secular on the other, we have not yet found true union with God. Meditating about God is to be a lifestyle, not an activity.

> One ought to keep hold of God in everything and accustom his mind to retain God always among his feelings, thoughts, and loves. Take care how you think of God. As you think of him in church or closet, think of him everywhere. Take him with you among the crowds and turmoil of the alien world. You should, however, maintain the same mind, the same trust, and the same earnestness toward God in all your doings.… On the other hand, the person who is not conscious of God's presence, but who must always be going out to get him from this and that, who has to seek him by special methods, as by means of some activity, person, or place—such people have not attained God.

The devotional writings of the late Middle Ages were not limited to men. The quest for the spiritual life was, of course, a woman's journey as well. And the women mystics, prominent in the thirteenth century, have left us an important body of literature. Mysticism for them was "an alternative to the authority of office," that is, office that was exclusively male and clerical, denied to women and laity. Yet it complemented the clerical office

rather than challenged it. The women's visions affirmed the priests and at the same time offered women and laity a mode of spirituality that was ambivalent about power and authority.

One theological emphasis to emerge was that of God's accessibility and comprehensibility. The women mystics desired to show God as loving and approachable and turned to analogies of human relationships to assist them in that endeavor. The theme of God's accessibility was poignantly captured for them in the reality that "Christ is what we are" in the miracle of incarnation that joined divinity to humanity. The image they offered was Jesus as mother. Flowering first in the twelfth century out of biblical metaphors (Is 66:13; Mt 23:37), the maternal imagery described Jesus' tender, nurturing, consoling virtues in human terms that, although helpful, did not exhaust his immensity. Julian of Norwich, who died in 1413, was an English mystic whose *Book of Showings* is a description of spiritual lessons on love for God. She provides an indispensable glimpse into the analogy:

> Jesus Christ who does good against evil is our true Mother—we have our being from Him where the basis of motherhood begins, with all the sweet protection of love that accompanies it endlessly.
>
> All the fair action and all the sweet natural function of dearworthy motherhood is attached to the Second Person; for in Him we have this divine will whole and safe without end, both in nature and grace, from His own excellent goodness.

In the following selection she teaches us that true rest and solace are found only in the Creator:

> This is the reason why we are not fully at ease in heart and soul: because here we seek rest in these things that are so little, in which there is no rest, and we recognize not our God who is all powerful, all wise, all good, for He is the true rest.
>
> God wishes to be known, and He delights that we remain in Him, because all that is less than He is not enough for us.
>
> And this is the reason why no soul is at rest until it is emptied of everything that is created. When the soul is willingly emptied for love in order to have Him who is all, then is it able to receive spiritual rest.

The mystics craved what Eugene H. Peterson calls transcendence, which is essential to human fullness. "*Transcendence:* we want to experience divine love and trust and joy. We are not ourselves by ourselves.... We hunger for divine meaning, someone who will touch us.... We hunger for communion with God, something beyond the satisfaction of self, the development of *me*. We are fed up with being told *about* God."

Peterson says that, along with transcendence, another essential to Christian spirituality is what he calls intimacy—an experience of being loved by humans and having trust and joy in those relationships. Spirituality takes into account both love of God and love of neighbor. The mystics emphasized the first, though most also saw the second as a necessary complement.

Peterson, in his contemporary paraphrase of some psalms, helps to capture the heart of the mystical spirit of the latter period of the Middle Ages:

> A white-tailed deer drinks
> from the creek;
> I want to drink God,
> deep draughts of God.
> I'm thirsty for God-alive.
> I wonder, "Will I ever make it—
> arrive and drink in God's presence?" (Ps 42:1–2, The Message)

> God—you're my God!
> I can't get enough of you!
> I've worked up such hunger and thirst for God,
> traveling across dry and weary desert. (63:1, The Message)

> You're all I want in heaven!
> You're all I want on earth!
> When my skin sags and my bones get brittle,
> Yahweh is rock-firm and faithful.
> Look! Those who left you are falling apart!
> Deserters, they'll never be heard from again.
> But I'm in the very presence of God—
> oh, how refreshing it is!
> I've made Lord Yahweh my home.
> God, I'm telling the world what you do! (73:25–28, The Message)

The medieval period was rich with Christian life: the eager search for intimacy with the living God as well as constant prayer and careful thinking in edifying

relationships with other believers. At the same time, though, there was an encroaching poverty: the institutionalization of the spiritual community that plundered freedom, laity and simplicity. From monastic reforms to lay preachers to female spirituality to devotionalism and mysticism, Christians separated themselves from that impoverishment in search of the wealth of life in the Spirit. We have barely scratched the surface of that journey's history. As our study continues, we will investigate the church in the age of reform during the third part of our survey.