

# OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

## LECTURE 8 – GOLDEN AGE OF THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS: SPECIFICALLY, JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AND AMBROSE

We'll start with a prayer from the period to be studied.

Be gracious to our prayers, O merciful God, and guard your people with loving protection; that those who confess your only begotten Son as God, born of our bodily flesh, may never be corrupted by the deceits of the devil; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A prayer for protection by Ambrose, who will be studied in section 4.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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- 2.2 They were well born
- 2.3 They studied long and deeply
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- 3.4 Exile and death

### TOPIC – JEROME AND THE VULGATE

### 4. AMBROSE OF MILAN (339 – 397)

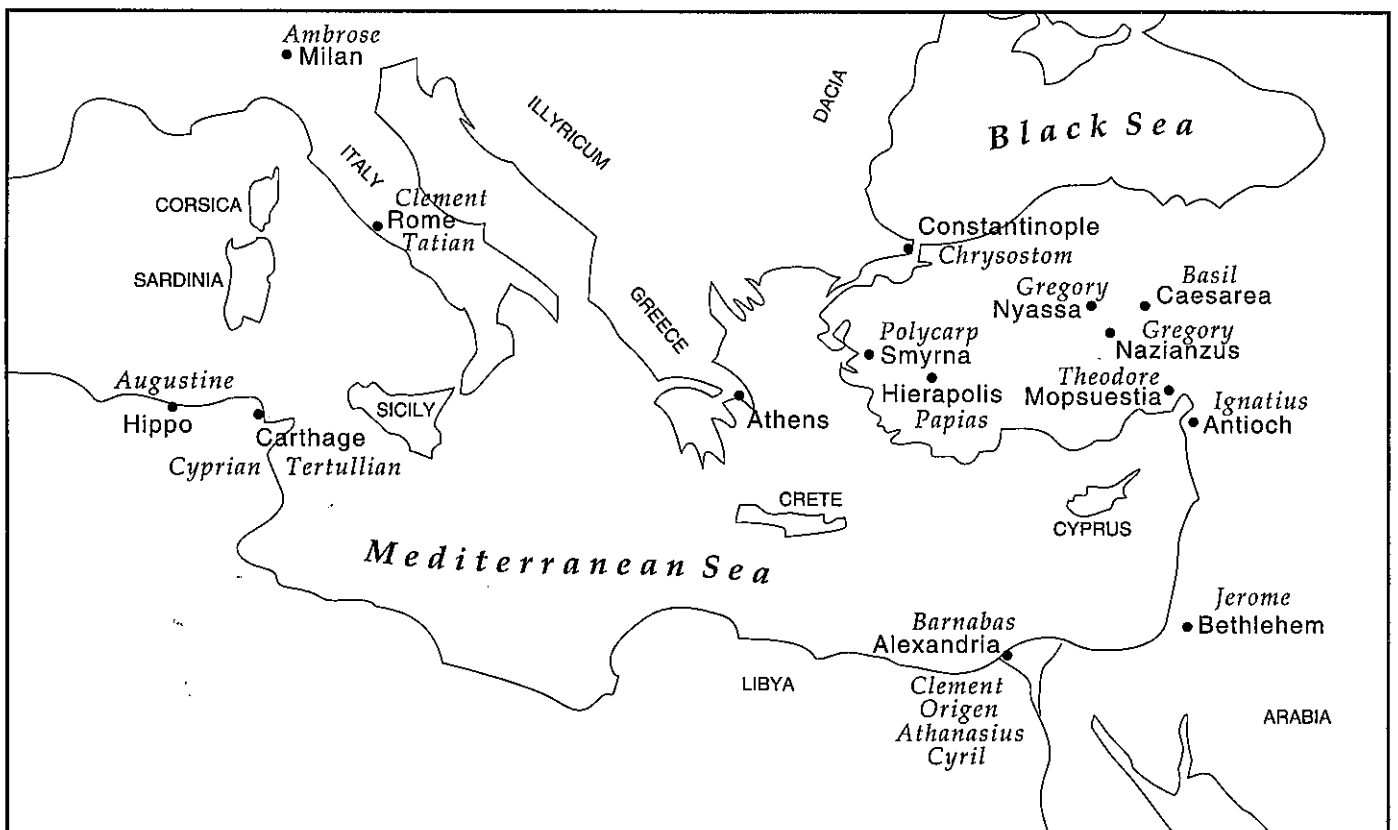
- 4.1 Biography
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- 4.3 Hymns - antiphonal singing
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### 5. BASILICAS, the Golden Age of early church building; also, 'relics' of saints to be incorporated in the altar of every church-building after the year 400.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The years following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, in 312, which brought peace to the church, are known as 'The Golden Age of the Early Church Fathers'. Two of these words need comment. 'Early' Church reminds us that there have been other periods in Church History which can be described as 'golden' for their era – some use it to describe the Reformation in the sixteenth century, some to describe the Pentecostal Movement in the twentieth century – but the years after the conversion of Constantine were, as the title says, 'The Golden Age of the Early Church Fathers'. The second comment is that the word 'Fathers' in the title emphasizes that it was not new policies, or imperial favour, which made it a Golden Age, but a galaxy of outstanding church leaders with outstanding personalities.

This lecture concentrates on three of them, John Chrysostom ('golden-mouth', because of his preaching) in the East (at Constantinople, at the top right of the map below), our Topic, Jerome, at the bottom right of the map, because he settled at Bethlehem) and Ambrose of Milan (at the top left of the map).



TEACHERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Remember, as we've seen before, the Church in the West and the East of the Roman Empire was going in different directions, thinking differently, although still one Church, and part of this lecture will bring out the differences, even in the fourth century.

We've noticed already that Latin-speaking Romans in the West were solid, unimaginative, practical, well-organized, liked to put their theology into formulae, and to concentrate on the Death of Christ; Greek-speaking Christians in the East were speculative, imaginative, colourful, restless, not satisfied with any theological formula but constantly trying to improve it, concentrating on the Incarnation of Christ.

This lecture will see another step on the road to their eventual separation, centuries later, into the Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East. There are now two Emperors, one for the West, based in Italy, and one for the East, based at Constantinople. The Eastern Emperor had the Patriarch, the leader of the Greek-speaking church, firmly under his thumb, as we'll see when we look at the life of John Chrysostom. It was the other way round in the West, where the church-leader Ambrose told the Emperor how to behave, as we'll see when we come to Ambrose.

Run your eye down the following list, but don't worry about all the names and dates; the three that we'll be looking are in bold type, just below halfway down, Ambrose, John and Jerome. The location of six of the others is shown on the map on page 2.

	Born	Bishop in	Died	Cairns
ATHANASIUS of Alexandria	c295	328	373	128
DAMASUS of Rome	c305	366	384	137
HILARY of Poitiers	c315	350	367	--
MARTIN of Tours	316	370	397	123, 147
BASIL of Caesarea (The Great)	c329	370	379	146
GREGORY of Nazianzus	c330	372	390	129
GREGORY of Nyssa	c332	371	394	129
<b>AMBROSE of Milan</b>	c339	374	397	138
<b>JOHN Chrysostom</b> ('golden mouth')	c347	398	407	134-5
EVAGRIUS of Pontus (Asia Minor)	345	(monk)	399	--
<b>JEROME</b>	c347	(monk)	419	137-8
THEODORE of Mopsuestia	c350	392	428	135
AUGUSTINE of Hippo	c354	395	430	139-142
John CASSIAN	c365	(monk)	c435	132

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS

Although these leaders were all individualists, with strong and colourful characters, they had sufficient in common for us to pick out six characteristics, as follows.

### 2.1 They had a Christian upbringing

All had the Christian faith taught to them from the cradle, either because their whole family had been converted, sometimes several generations back, or at least because their mothers were Christians. The part played by Christian mothers in their sons' spiritual training and growth was incalculable, illustrated by the mother of John Chrysostom, who

was widowed at twenty and deliberately did not remarry in order to devote herself to the education of her son, with spectacular results, as we will see.

## 2.2 They were well born

As the result of the progress of Christianity in Roman society, most of the Fathers of the Golden Age belonged by birth to the elite of society and sometimes to very highest families. Ambrose was the son of a Roman Governor, and John Chrysostom's father was a military commander, respectively the highest civil and military posts in the Empire. The exception was Augustine, who was born of humble parents but their ambition and devotion gave him a first-rate education, which opened the way for him to rise up the social ladder.

## 2.3 They were well educated

All studied long and deeply. Most of them spent years at universities, where their teachers were pagan – the Empire was not yet Christian – that came later, in 381, as we saw earlier - but they were famous teachers and these men gained a thorough education without it impairing their Christian faith. They brought their learning to the service of the Church.

While the Church continued to grow rapidly, following Constantine showing favour to Christians, many pagans flooded into the Church without any real understanding, and it was the duty of the bishops to train them. They did this by preaching, and their sermons were rich in doctrine, working through whole books of the Bible and providing commentaries on them. It is amazing how much doctrine they packed into a sermon.

## 2.4. They had, or could have had, good civil careers

Having finished their studies, the majority began their careers in the secular world. Several became teachers; Martin entered the army for a career, while Ambrose rose rapidly up the civil service. BUT

## 2.5 They were called to 'Christian perfection'

Their civil careers were interrupted when they heard and followed the call to 'Christian perfection' (which we'll define in a moment). About the age of thirty, for many, they were baptised - which they had postponed, following usual the practice of time, because the responsibilities implicit in baptism were taken seriously. Except Ambrose, below.

'Christian Perfection' as they called it, was based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:21: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor... and come, follow me.' So there were two components (1) they gave away all their worldly possessions and (2) they practiced an ascetic lifestyle; many of them found this perfection in the desert – many in monasteries (as we'll see in Lecture 12). They were in training for 'Christian perfection', leaving the world, literally leaving society for monasticism, to follow Jesus. And so, finally,

## 2.6 They (except 3) served the Church as bishops

After training in the desert (again except Ambrose), usually for three or five years, for which they remained nostalgic all their life, they returned to society. Except for three of them, they became bishops and proved themselves to be great bishops. The three exceptions – the names are on the chart– remained monks for all the rest of their lives.

### 3. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (c344-407)

In preparation read Cairns, 134-5; Vos, 25; Lion, 199; Olson, 294-6; Lane, 38-39.

John was the most glorious preacher of the Early Church, which nicknamed him Chrysostom, Greek for 'goldenmouth', for his preaching. He normally worked his way through an entire book of the Bible. Others wrote down what he preached, and his sermons were published as commentaries. Many have survived – we have 58 one-hour commentaries on the Psalms, 90 on Matthew's Gospel, and 88 on John's. He also preached sermons on specific subjects (a sample is below).

#### 3.1 Early years

John was born at Antioch (see the map on page 2) in 345. His father, a high-ranking army officer, died when John was a child, and he was brought up by his Christian mother, Anthusa, who was widowed when only twenty; she remained a widow in order to devote herself to bringing John up in the Christian faith. John's teacher in later life, an eminent but pagan teacher, who regarded John as his best student, said of John's mother, 'what wonderful women these Christians have'. As a young man, John first pursued a career in law - remember the characteristic - but under the influence of his local bishop, he abandoned his dreams of a legal career, was baptised c370, and began a new career in the Church. As part of that, he went off for two years and lived by himself in a mountain cave outside Antioch (this was the pathway to 'Christian perfection', as defined at 2.5); he then he came back into the city, was ordained a deacon in 381, and then a presbyter and so authorized to preach.

A sculpture of John Chrysostom in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, New York City.



#### 3.2 Preaching at Antioch

John preached verse-by-verse through books of the Bible, what we call Expository Preaching. His preaching so entranced congregations in Antioch that pickpockets plied a busy trade while people (who were standing) concentrated on his words. Remember when we looked at a typical service in the Early Church, in Topic 2, we saw that everyone stood for the sermon except for the preacher, who sat; that's why in this picture John is seated. He was direct and outspoken in denouncing sin among believers, especially sin of compromising with worldly standards of behaviour. He also made hard-hitting criticisms of the way that rich Christians used or abused their wealth. For example:

'The covetous man is a keeper, not a master of wealth, a slave not a lord. For he would sooner give away a portion of his flesh than his buried gold. ... Since he has not the ability to give his riches to others or to distribute them to the needy ... how can he possibly call them his own? In what way does he possess them when he has neither the free use nor the enjoyment of them. ... To be rich is not to possess much but to give much. ... Let us decorate our souls rather than our houses. Is it not a disgrace to clothe our walls with marble, vainly and for no purpose, and to neglect Christ who is going about unclothed [in the poor]. What will your house profit you? Will you take it with you when you leave [this world]? You cannot take your house with you but you will surely take your soul with you ... We build houses to live in,

not for ambitious display. What is beyond your needs is superfluous and useless. Try putting on a shoe that is too large! You will not be able to endure it because it will hinder your step. So also, a house larger than your needs is a hindrance to your progress towards heaven. ... You are an alien and a pilgrim with regard to the things of this world. You have a native country - in the heavens. Transfer your wealth there. ... Do you want to be rich? Have God as your friend and you will be richer than all men! ... It is clear that the only people who own property are those who despise its use and deride its enjoyment. For the man who has cast his wealth away and bestowed it on the poor has used it rightly. He takes the ownership of it with him when he departs, not being stripped of possession even in death, but then receiving it all back again.' *Homilies on the Statues*, 2:14-18

### 3.3 Move to Constantinople

The head of the Eastern Church, based in Constantinople, was, as mentioned earlier, known as the Patriarch. When the Patriarch died in 398, the Emperor, who had heard about John and his golden preaching, thought it would bring glory to the Eastern capital to have him as Patriarch. To prevent the citizens of Antioch from rioting in protest at the loss of their favourite preacher, the emperor sent troops to Antioch, who invited the unsuspecting Chrysostom to go with them to visit a chapel outside the city, where the troops kidnapped Chrysostom and took him to Constantinople.

Chrysostom's gripping sermons at the Church of Holy Wisdom (Constantinople's chief church) immediately won him a big popular following among ordinary people. But he also made dangerous enemies among the rich and powerful. His uncompromising denunciation of vice, his refusal to parade in pomp, his ascetic lifestyle, all earned him their enmity.

The storm, which would eventually sweep John from his post, was gathering. He didn't fit into the corrupt political world of the Eastern capital; he had neither taste nor talent for politics. His forthright denunciation, from his pulpit, of sin in the imperial court, outraged many, including the Empress; some morally dubious conduct on her part inspired Chrysostom to preach about the Old Testament Queen Jezebel in a way that listeners realised he was referring to the Empress.

John was accused, on trumped-up charges, of various offences, including sucking throat lozenges in church. This Tribunal had no validity in church law, but the Emperor's troops arrested John and started to take him into exile. A few days later, an earthquake shook Constantinople. The Empress, terrified that this was God's judgment, ordered the troops to bring Chrysostom back. He re-entered Constantinople in triumph, with people cheering.

### 3.4 Exile and death

A few months later, in September 404, the Empress had a silver statue of herself set up near the Church of Holy Wisdom. Games and festivities around the statue disturbed services of worship, at which Chrysostom expressed strong disapproval. The Empress was enraged and again began scheming for his downfall. Feeling his enemies closing in, Chrysostom compared her in a sermon to Herodias (Mark 6:14-29) demanding the head of John the Baptist on a platter; John Chrysostom preached that a new Herodias was here, demanding the head of God's servant John (his name) on a platter. The Emperor sent troops, who marched into the Church during a baptismal service, seized Chrysostom and took him into exile. The people of

Constantinople rioted in protest, so the soldiers moved Chrysostom to a more remote place. He was over-exposed to the sun on the journey and died.

He was the most gifted preacher and Bible commentator of the Eastern Church in the patristic age. His fate, however, showed that no bishop in the Eastern Empire could stand against the Emperor - contrast to the West where, as we're going to see in a moment, Ambrose of Milan forced the Emperor Theodosius to bow to his will.

TOPIC – JEROME AND THE VULGATE – was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

4. AMBROSE OF MILAN (339 – 379) Cairns, 138; Lion, 148-9, 151; Vos, 22-23; Lane, 37-38; Hanks, *Great Christians*, 43-46.

#### 4.1 Biography

Ambrose came from an upper-class Roman family with a long Christian pedigree. He was born in Trier, where his father was Governor of the Roman province of Gaul (modern France). When his father died, the family moved to Rome, where Ambrose was educated. He studied law – the usual path in those days to high civic office; promotion came quickly and he was appointed governor of the Roman province centred on the city of Milan. He became known as a conscientious government official, and this led to the unexpected consequence that we're going to see in a moment.

Milan was now the most important city of Italy, even more important than Rome, and the Emperor now lived in Milan and its church enjoyed great prestige. We're going to see, in Lecture 10, how false teaching about the divinity of Christ, known as Arianism, was rife throughout the Church at this time; when Ambrose came to Milan, the Bishop of Milan was an Arian. When he died in 374, the mainstream Catholic Church and the Arian supporters both put up their rival candidates to be the next bishop. They had a church meeting, but neither of the two opposing factions would give in and a serious squabble developed. As provincial governor, it was Ambrose's duty to ensure that the election didn't erupt into public disorder and violence, so for the resumed church meeting the conscientious Ambrose went along to supervise. He wasn't a member of the church, as he had, deliberately, for reasons we've noticed several times, not yet been baptized.

As Ambrose addressed the crowd, exhorting them to decide peacefully, a voice - some said it was that of child - was heard above the shouting, calling, 'Ambrose for bishop'. Both factions took up the cry, 'Ambrose for bishop'. He wasn't baptised, far less ordained, so Ambrose, aged 34, was horrified, and resisted the pressure for several days, but he then accepted that this was God's Will for his life; he gave up his government post and disposed of all his wealth and property. Arrangements were made for his baptism, and eight days after his call, he was consecrated bishop of Milan, and served with distinction for 23 years. We'll look at five reasons, in 4.2 through to 4.6, why he became so significant in the Western Church.

#### 4.2 Western doctrine of the independence of the Church from the State

Ambrose enjoyed a good relationship with the Western Roman Emperor, who lived in Milan, although he had successfully made a stand in 384 and 386 against the Emperor's proposals to use buildings for non-Christian purposes. (Lane, 37-38) However, two

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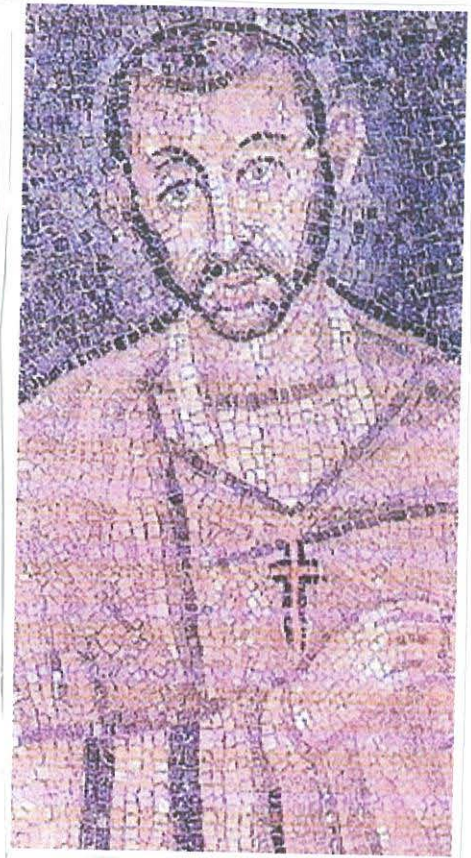
Ambrose enjoyed a good relationship with the Western Roman Emperor, who lived in Milan, although he had successfully made a stand in 384 and 386 against the Emperor's proposals to use buildings for non-Christian purposes. (Lane, 37-38) However, two dramatic incidents, the first in 388, defined Western Church/State relationships. Christians in a city on the Euphrates burnt down a



Jewish synagogue. Theodosius ordered the local bishop to rebuild the synagogue from church funds. Ambrose intervened, declaring that it was wrong for a Christian bishop to be forced to use his church's money to build a place for non-Christian worship. He preached a sermon against Theodosius when Theodosius (the Emperor, no less) was sitting in the congregation, and refused to let Theodosius take communion unless he gave up his plan to make Christians rebuild the synagogue. Theodosius gave in to Ambrose and the synagogue was not rebuilt – a Western Church leader using his disciplinary power to force a Christian emperor into obeying his will. Ambrose wrote: ‘The emperor is within the Church, not above it.’



Some modern artists have Ambrose dressed as a modern bishop, with cope, mitre and crozier, but he wore a white woollen tunic, with sleeves, like a modern shirt, not draped on his shoulders. The picture above and also the one at the foot of this page, are too ‘venerable’.



Early mosaic of Ambrose in the church St. Ambrogio, Milan, which might be an actual portrait

There was a further and even more dramatic confrontation between Ambrose and Theodosius two years later. In 390 a rioting mob in the city of Thessalonica murdered the governor and several officials. Theodosius was normally wise, generous, far-seeing ruler, but he was prone to wild outbursts, and on hearing this he ‘lost the head’ and ordered his soldiers to massacre the Thessalonians as punishment. Almost immediately Theodosius repented and sent another order cancelling his savage decree, but it was too late. Roman troops, eager to avenge the murder of their governor, had already butchered 7,000 people.

When Ambrose heard of this, he excommunicated the emperor and ordered him to undertake deep, meaningful repentance. Theodosius turned up at church in Milan on Sunday, as if nothing had happened, but Ambrose refused to let him in. The Emperor claimed he had repented; Ambrose said that words were not enough - his repentance must be as public as his sin had been. Theodosius submitted and walked through the streets of Milan doing public penance. He was banned from attending worship for eight months. When Ambrose finally allowed him to enter church again, the Emperor had to kneel and beg God's forgiveness before the whole congregation, which he did with tears streaming from his eyes.



Ambrose Rebukes Theodosius

This was the second time that bishop Ambrose had used his spiritual authority to humble the Roman emperor, but he had the 'trump card' (if you'll excuse my using words from card games) – excommunication, so you would die in your sins. Ambrose and others in the West used it repeatedly - contrast how the Patriarch (leader in East) was never able to use this because the powerful Eastern Emperor used military force against him.

#### 4.3 Hymns - Antiphonal singing

Ambrose made two lasting contributions to Church music and singing.

He introduced the Eastern practice of congregational hymn-singing to church services in the West. Prior to Ambrose, Churches in the West sang the Old Testament Psalms and other poetic passages of Scripture set to music (e.g. the Magnificat of Luke 1:46-55), but not newly written songs of worship. He himself wrote (what we now call) songs of worship, congregational/community hymn-singing, twelve of which are still used. This got the congregation involved in the worship. Part of one of them, translated, is:

Ambrose also introduced "antiphonal" singing, in which half the congregation sang one part of a hymn, and then other half of congregation sang next part, and so on. From Milan, this practice spread to all the Western churches.

Ambrose also wrote hymns to teach his congregation the orthodox doctrine of Christ during the Arian controversy (Lecture 10). Singing traditional hymns is still a good way to learn doctrine.

#### 4.4 Influence on Emperor's decision to make Christianity the official and only religion of the Roman Empire

We saw in the last lecture how the Emperor, Theodosius, (that's the Emperor whom Ambrose faced down about the synagogue and the massacre), made Christianity the official religion throughout the Empire, so he was a very powerful man. He did this 2 years after Ambrose died, but Ambrose was in fact behind the thinking which went into it, outlawing heresy and pagan worship throughout the Empire and, in the broadest sense, made the Roman Empire Christian. It was Ambrose who had persuaded Theodosius that it was the right thing for a Christian Emperor to do.

#### 4.5 Church administration

Ambrose was also a great administrator – he had been trained in government, and he brought to his office of bishop his skills as an administrator of the best type – he ruled his diocese with the firmness and the fairness of a secular governor – continuing the good work of Cyprian, whom we looked at in Lecture 6.

For teaching which prepared the way for Augustine's doctrine of original sin (Lecture 9), and other teaching which led to the doctrine of transubstantiation (Lecture 16), Lane 37.

### A HYMN OF AMBROSE

Maker of all things, God most high,  
Great ruler of the starry sky,  
Who, robing day with beauteous light,  
Hast clothed in soft repose the night,

That sleep may wearied limbs restore,  
And fit for toil and use once more,  
May gently soothe the careworn breast,  
And lull our anxious griefs to rest.

We thank thee for the day that's gone;  
We pray thee for the night come on;  
O help us sinners as we raise  
To thee our votive hymn of praise.

From every carnal passion free  
O may our hearts repose in thee!  
Nor envious fiend, with harmful snare,  
Our rest with sinful terrors share.

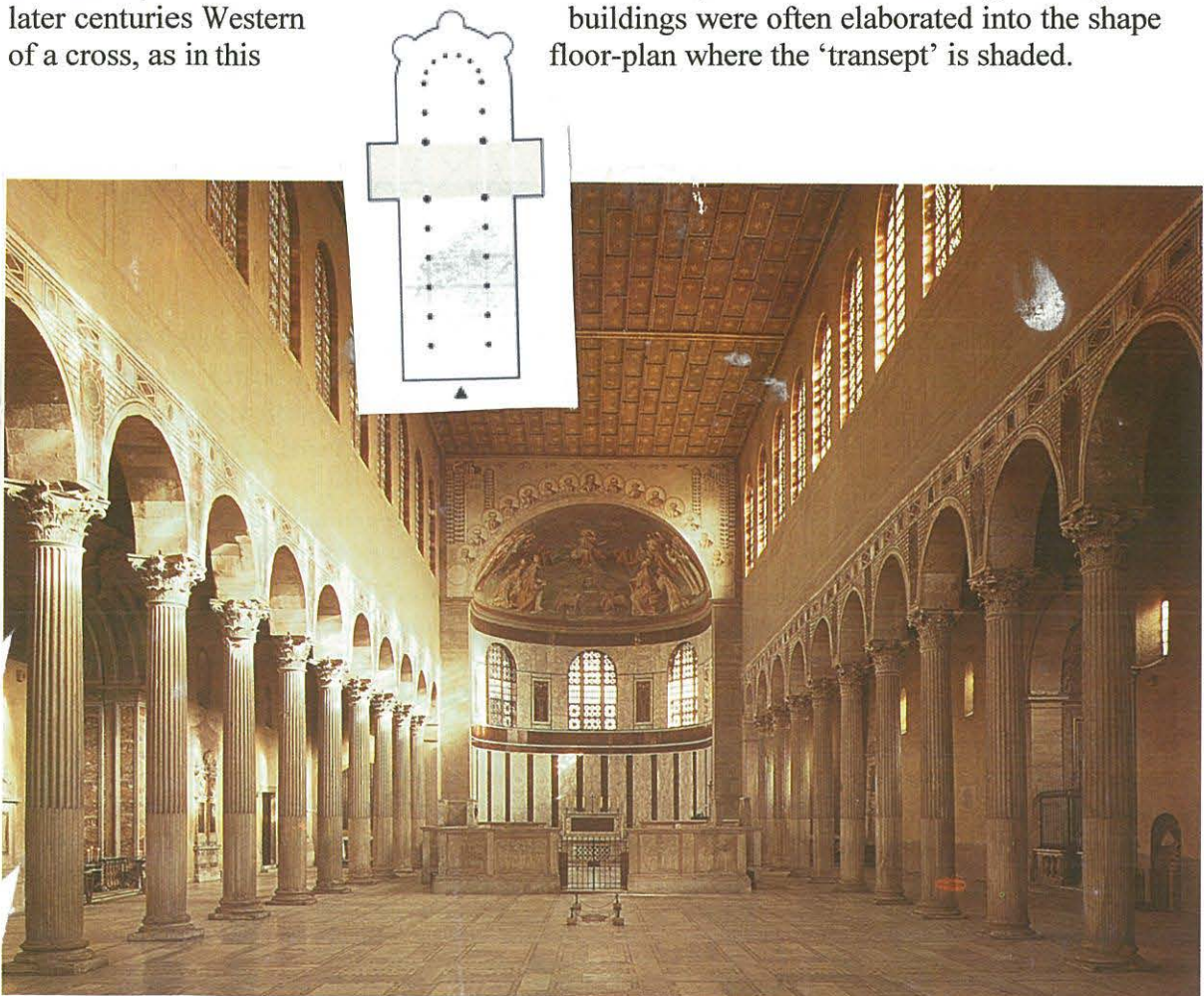
Christ with the Father ever one,  
Spirit! the Father and the Son,  
God over all, the mighty sway,  
Shield us, great Trinity, we pray.

*Translated by John D. Chambers, 1864*

## 5. Basilicas, the Golden Age of early church building

As well as being a 'Golden Age' in the sense of outstanding leaders, these years saw the beginning of a 'Golden Age' of church building. Every Roman city had an important building in its centre, called a 'basilica', constructed to a rectangular plan and with many columns. Not wishing to build in the style of pagan temples, Christian architects copied the basilica-style for new church buildings, and kept the name 'basilica' for them. See Cairns, 117; Lion 45-46, 76-77 and 158-161 for further details.

In Roman basilicas, the king or judge or senior magistrate – civil basilicas were multi-purpose buildings – sat in large rounded recess at one end of the building. Christian architects adapted this idea, and located the communion table ('altar') and the bishop there. The congregation stood in the body of the basilica – there were no seats – and vast crowds now attended services in these huge buildings. The basic structure has remained ever since, as one of most common styles of church building, although in later centuries Western buildings were often elaborated into the shape of a cross, as in this floor-plan where the 'transept' is shaded.



BASILICA OF SANTA SABINA, COMPLETED 432

*The new services tended to increase the role and prestige of the clergy. By the end of the fourth century, the emphasis on the mystery and splendour of the communion service had led to the*

*altar being separated from the people in the main body, or nave, of the church by a curtain or screen (as shown above), further distancing the clergy and laity from each other.*

Built between 422 and 432, the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome, on one of Rome's seven hills, is an excellent example of a 5th-century Christian church building. Its wooden doors are carved with biblical scenes. Decorations have been restored to their original modesty, mostly white. Together with light pouring in from windows, this makes Santa Sabina an airy and roomy place. Other basilicas are often heavily and gaudily decorated.

## ‘RELICS’

‘Relics’ (from the Latin word for ‘remains’ or ‘something left behind’) are parts of the body or clothing of a venerated person or parts of a venerated object. Relics have nothing to do with John Chrysostom or Jerome or Ambrose personally, but we should be aware of their place in the life of the Church, generally, by the year 400.

Many Christians visited Jerusalem and other parts of Holy Land to see where Jesus had lived. It was inevitable that a tourist trade in souvenirs grew up – selling (alleged) pieces of the manger, the left-over pieces of bread after the feeding of the 5000, nail clippings and bones of various apostles and saints, etc. Wherever pilgrimages were made, relics were on sale.

The article below describes an exhibition in the British Museum in London. It mentions the veneration of Polycarp's bones, whose martyrdom we looked in Lecture 7, page 3. Many miracles were attributed to relics, especially during the Middle Ages. By the late Middle Ages the collecting of, and dealing in, relics had reached enormous proportions; in the absence of any way of assessing authenticity, relic-collectors became prey to the unscrupulous, and some high prices were paid.

As the article says, at the foot of the left-hand column, in the year 400 a Council decreed that every church altar in Christendom should have a saint's relics incorporated with it. Perhaps the most famous claims of recent years involve the Shroud of Turin, said to be the burial shroud of Jesus.

## Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe

*British Museum, London WC1 (020-7323 8299, [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)).*

Bones of martyrs, sandals of saints, thorns from Christ's crown of thorns: the cult of relics may seem bizarre to modern sensibilities, said Eamon Duffy in *The Guardian*, but to medieval Christians it was a “defiant affirmation of the belief that defeat in the cause of Christ was in fact a transcendent victory. The body brutalised by torture would shine one day in glory, as Christ's risen body had shone, and was already a channel of divine healing and consolation.” As early as 156AD, a witness to the martyrdom of St Polycarp tells how “we took up his bones, more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place”. The shrines that sprang up wherever a saint had died gained such prestige that they began to threaten the authority of the Church. It cannily responded by moving the relics under cathedral altars, and in 400AD, at the 5th Council of Carthage, decreed that every church altar in Christendom should have a saint's relic incorporated within it. Fundamental to the growing cult was the practice of enshrining even the smallest relic – fingernail, strand of hair, fragment of skin – in a precious container of the kind displayed in this magnificent exhibition.



*The “beautiful blue” Reliquary Chasse with the Adoration of the Magi (above), and bust of an unknown saint c.1520-1530 (right)*

*Treasures of Heaven* contains an “astonishing” number of these reliquaries, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*, all “beautifully displayed under the soaring dome of the Reading Room” of the British Museum. Generally made of silver and gold, and “embellished with enamels, gemstones and rock crystal (a symbol of spiritual purity) through which the relic could be seen”, they often take the form of a simple, decorated box representing a sarcophagus or tomb. In other instances the relic is housed in a crucifix, or within a life-sized sculpture of the saints' heads, busts, limbs, feet or hands. Lavish expenditure was essential, as “consummate workmanship greatly contributed to the awe in which the relics themselves were held”.

There is a wonderfully wide range of objects in this “visually glorious” show, said Paul Levy in *The Wall Street Journal*, from the “exquisitely detailed” Roman carved sarcophagus panels – the

*Tree Sarcophagus with the Anastasis* (circa 340-50AD) is especially noteworthy – to the “beautiful blue” enamel *Limoges Reliquary Chasse with the Adoration of the Magi* (circa 1220AD). Not everyone will be able to make the leap of imagination required to understand why these old bits of bone were so venerated, said Richard Dormant in *The Daily Telegraph*. But everyone can admire the “wonderful examples of medieval craftsmanship”.



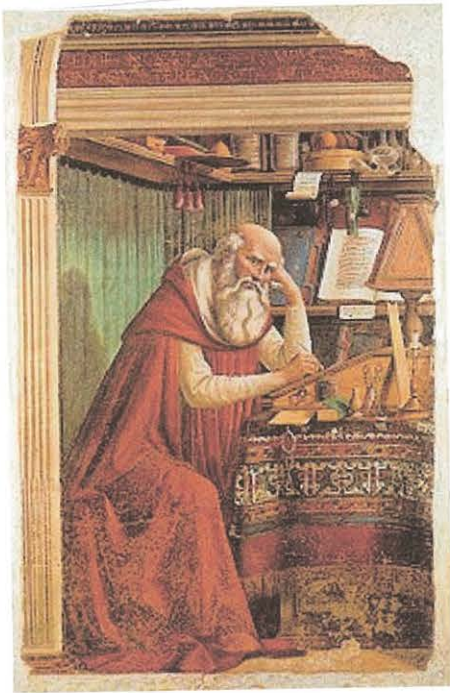
## OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

### TOPIC FOR LECTURE 8 – JEROME (c347-420) AND VULGATE

Please give us a short biography of the life of Jerome, and tell us about his translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate.

Neither of these (except occasional references to the importance of the Vulgate) will be covered elsewhere in the lectures.

Cairns, 137-8; Lion, 196-7; Vos, 22; Lane, 39-41; Hanks, 70 *Great Christians*, 46-49; Hanks, *Great Events*, 85-91. Picture at Cairns, 137.



St. Jerome in study. Writing implements, scrolls, and manuscripts testify to his scholarly pursuits

Just to illustrate how politics can complicate religion, consider position of this edition of Vulgate, known as the Sixtine Vulgate. With invention of printing-presses in 1450, many editions of Vulgate circulated around Europe, but there was no authoritative one. In 1546, Roman Catholic Church ordered an 'official' version to be prepared; this took over forty years, and when it was printed in 1590, it took its name from Pope at time, Sixtus V, and so was known as the 'Sixtine Vulgate'. Owing to infighting between factions of Church, it was withdrawn immediately after Sixtus' death, on pretext that there were inaccuracies in its printing, and a new edition was published.

