

## **Lecture 13-Three Theologians, Two Emperors, and a Church Council**

*The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the creeds of the church, and if we think it dull it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning.*

*Dorothy Sayers*

*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*

*1 Timothy 3:16*

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity*—chapters 18 & 20

### **Key Terms**

The Great Cappadocians, Julian the Apostate, Theodosius, Council of Constantinople

### **Objectives**

- Explain what happened to Christianity after the death of Constantine and throughout the remaining years of the fourth century

### **Class Prayer**

*“O Light that knew no dawn, that shines to endless day,  
All things in earth and heav’n are lusted by Thy ray;  
No eye can to Thy throne ascend, nor mind Thy brightness comprehend.  
In supplication meek to Thee I bend the knee;  
O Christ, when Thou shalt come, in love remember me,  
And in Thy kingdom, by Thy grace,  
Grant me a humble servant’s place.  
Thy grace, O Father, give, I humbly Thee implore;  
And let Thy mercy bless Thy servant more and more.  
All grace and glory be to Thee,  
From age to age eternally. Amen.”*  
*Gregory of Nazianzus*

## **Three Theologians, Two Emperors, and a Church Council**

### **I. The Great Cappadocians**

- A. The “golden age of Greek orthodoxy”: brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa (and their sister Macrina) and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus
- B. The mystery of the Godhead
  1. “God’s being is infinite, and so the more that the finite mind knows of him, the more it becomes aware of its ignorance”; “In speaking of God, when there is a question of His essence, then is the time to keep silence. When, however, it is a question of His operation...that is the time to speak.” Gregory of Nyssa.
  2. “The begetting of God must be honored by silence. It is a great thing for you to learn that he was begotten. But the manner of his generation we will not admit that even angels can conceive, much less you.” Gregory of Nazianzus.

## C. The deity of the Holy Spirit

1. *On the Holy Spirit* by Basil of Caesarea.

## D. The complete humanity of Jesus

1. “That which He has not assumed, he has not healed; but that which is united to His godhead, is also saved.” Gregory of Nazianzus.

## E. Care of the needy

1. “Let us put into practice the supreme and primary law of God. He sends down rain on just and sinful alike and to earth’s creatures he has given the broad earth, the springs, the rivers, and the forests...He has given abundantly to all the basic needs of life, not as a private possession, not restricted by law, not divided by boundaries, but as common to all, amply and in rich measure.” Gregory of Nazianzus.

## II. Two Emperors

## A. Julian the Apostate (emperor 361-363)

1. Converted to paganism at age 20
2. Re-opened the pagan temples and planned to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple  
Julian: “Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done the most to increase atheism [Christianity]? It is disgraceful when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well...”
3. Death in battle in 363 (“Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!”)

## B. Theodosius (emperor 379-95)

1. Destruction of pagan temples
2. Decree against heresy  
“We command that those persons who follow this rule [the Nicene faith] shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of our own initiative, which we shall assume in accordance with the divine judgment.”

## III. The Council of Constantinople (381)

## A. Deity of the Holy Spirit— “...the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the father, who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified”

1. Son “begotten” of the Father (Nicea)
2. Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father (Constantinople)

## B. Commonly used “Nicene Creed” is that affirmed at Constantinople

## C. The “Athanasian Creed” is a summary of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity from the first five centuries

Questions for Consideration

1. How were pagans persecuted in the time of Theodosius?
2. Was there another emperor between the death of Julian and the succession of Theodosius?
3. Was there a Christian response to the persecution of pagans?

For Further StudyGregory of Nyssa. *Life of Moses*

A book of devout imagination, Gregory reads Scripture wildly, extravagantly, curiously. But he subjects himself to sober obedience.

Read the brief selection from Gregory of Nyssa “On the Lord’s Prayer.” What ideas does he include? How do you respond to what he says?