

**Lecture 22- Eternal Wisdom: Learning and Theology**

*When the future is uncertain the mind turns naturally to the certainties at the past, and finds comfort in what is beyond the peril of change.*

*John Buchan*

*The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

*Psalm 119:130*

**Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity*—No reading assignment for this lecture

**Key Terms**

Boethius, John Scotus, Radbertus, Ratramnus, Gottschalk

**Objectives**

- Compare and contrast the views of the Lord's Supper held by Radbertus and Ratramnus
- List the highlights of learning in the early Middle Ages

**Class Prayer**

*"Eternal Light, shine into our hearts,*

*Eternal Goodness, deliver us from evil;*

*Eternal Power, be our support,*

*Eternal Wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance;*

*Eternal Pity, have mercy upon us;*

*that with all our heart and mind and soul and strength we may seek your face and be brought by your infinite mercy to your holy presence; through Christ our Lord. Amen."*

*Alcuin of York (732-804)*

**Eternal Wisdom: Learning and Theology**

"At his most characteristic, medieval man was not a dreamer nor a wanderer. He was an organizer, a codifier, a builder of systems. He wanted 'a place for everything and everything in the right place.' Distinction, definition, tabulation were his delight... There was nothing which medieval people liked better, or did better, than sorting out and tidying up. Of all our modern inventions I suspect that they would most have admired the card index." [Or, now, the computer!]

C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, p. 10

**I. Learning**

A. Boethius (480-525)—*Consolation of Philosophy*

B. Isidore of Seville (560-636)—*Book of Sentences, Origins or Etymologies*

C. Dionysius "the Pseudo-Areopagite" (c. 500)

1. The "negative" way to God (= apophatic)

Dionysius: "Therefore this is the [goal of human knowledge of God]; that he [the human being] knows that he does not know God, and that in so far as he knows, what God is transcends all that we understand of him."

2. Celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy

John Calvin: "If you had read that book [Celestial Hierarchy], you would think a man fallen from heaven recounted, not what he had learned, but what he had seen with his own eyes." (Institutes 1, 14, 4)

D. Celtic Christianity (6th and 7th centuries)

E. The Carolingian Renaissance (8th and 9th centuries)

1. "...a true shaft of light within the relative cultural darkness of the early middle ages."  
(Ozment, p. 3)
2. Alcuin of York (730-804)

## II. Theology

A. John Scotus Eriugena

B. The Lord's Supper debate of the 9th century

1. Radbertus—actual body and blood of Christ ("Catholic")
2. Ratramnus—Christ truly present but in a spiritual sense ("Reformed")
3. Transubstantiation fixed as dogma by the Lateran Council in 1215

C. Predestination

1. Council of Orange (529)—semi-Augustinianism?
  - a. Paul Wooley: "It is not too much to say that in the conclusions of Orange truths are set forth which, if adhered to by the church, would have made the Protestant Reformation in the form that it took unnecessary. Salvation by grace alone through faith is taught by the Council of Orange." (*What is a Creed for?* p.101)
  - b. Kurt Aland: "The moment one speaks only about election to salvation and not simultaneously about election to condemnation—which soon happened—one departs from Augustine." (*The Beginnings of Christianity*, p. 208)
2. Semi-Pelagianism—John Cassian (The Conferences)
3. Gottschalk and Florus of Lyon

Gottschalk: "For just as the unchangeable God, prior to the creation of the world, by His free grace unchangeably predestined all of His elect to eternal life, so has this unchangeable God in the same way unchangeably predestined all of the rejected, who shall be condemned to eternal death for their evil deeds on judgment day according to His justice and as they deserve." (*Migne*, PL 121)
4. Pelagianism—the persistent heresy
5. See "Doctrines of Sin and Grace" (after this page)