

PATRISTIC WRITERS: THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

The Patristic writings are usually defined as the surviving texts of the Christian teachers from the end of the first century—when the New Testament was

being completed—until the seventh century. Some would extend the term to the thirteenth century, when the tradition of Scholasticism took hold. Although the New Testament itself properly precedes the Patristic texts, the latter presume it as a canonical source, so that some attention must be given to it at the outset.

The New Testament. The Secret Gospel of Mark (as reconstructed by Morton Smith) may have treated Jesus' implied homoerotic relationship with a male catechumen before the theme was expunged from the surviving text of canonical Mark. As we know them, the gospels are so reticent that disputes still rage over whether Jesus recommended the chastity he apparently practiced over the marriage he praised, although subsequently disciples abandoned wives as well as parents to follow him.

Jesus criticized those who followed the letter of the law instead of the spirit of love. More than any other evangelist, St. Luke portrays Jesus as contradicting rabbinical conventions on sex, for example by teaching that to follow him a man must reject his wife's love or that celibacy might be necessary for salvation. In the early church, before tradition took shape or the texts of the gospels were fixed, though praising and practicing every variety of sexuality from virginity to promiscuity, most Christians, conscious of standing apart from and above pagans in sexual mores, accepted the Judaic view that homosexuality, like infanticide, was a sin.

Deemed the second founder, St. Paul, whose epistles are the earliest of preserved Christian writings and came to comprise one-third of the New Testament when its canon was established about A.D. 200, was explicit about sex. He prescribed marriage only for those too weak to remain chaste, but forbade divorce, available at the whim of Jewish, Greek, and Roman husbands, as well as polygamy, then common among Jews, and levirate marriage, which had been mandatory, of a brother's widow. In other ways, however,

greatly influenced by the Old Testament, by pharisaic Judaism, and by the melange of ascetic Platonism and theosophical Judaism best exemplified by Philo Judaeus, he forbade sex outside of marriage. This included concubinage, and he singled out homosexuality, even between females, for special condemnation, as well as transvestism of either sex, long hair on males and other signs of effeminacy or softness, and masturbation. Romans 1:18–32, Titus 1:10, Timothy 1:10, and I Corinthians 6:9 all emphatically condemn male homosexuality.

Greek (and Coptic) Fathers. The earliest post-Biblical (non-canonical) Christian homophobic writing that has been preserved, the Epistle of Barnabas, explained that the Mosaic law declared the hare unclean because it stood for sodomites. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* claimed that Paul demanded total renunciation of sex. The *Acts of Andrew the Apostle* told a lady that her renunciation of sex with her husband would repair the Fall. In the *Acts of John* Christ thrice dissuaded the apostle from marrying. By the mid-third century, the *Acts of Thomas* were enthusiastic about the sexless life. The *Gnostic Gospel According to the Egyptians* argued that Adam and Eve by introducing sex brought about death.

On returning to the Near East from Rome in 172, Tatian, a student of Justin Martyr (who had even approved another young man's wish to be castrated), enjoined chastity on all Christians. Many Syrian churches allowed only celibate males to be baptized. By the second and third centuries, certain heretics argued that marriage was Satanic. Marcionites described the body as a nest of guilt. The *Gospel According to the Egyptians* had Jesus speak of paradise in which the sexes had not been differentiated. Libertine sects were exceptional in this period. Thus the second-century Alexandrian heretic Carpocrates' teen-aged son Epiphanes, who succeeded him as head of the sect, allowed women and goods to be held in common.

St. Clement (ca. 150–ca. 215), who studied at Alexandria under Pantaenus, whom he succeeded as head of its catechetical school until he fled the persecution of 202, combined the Gnostic belief that illumination brought perfection with the Platonic doctrine that ignorance rather than sin caused evil. Borrowing phrases from neo-Platonism and Stoicism, Clement condemned homosexuality as contrary to nature and idealized a sexless marriage as between brother and sister. After him most Christians wrote far less positively of the married life. Pseudo-Clement opined that one had to look far away to the *Sinae* (to China) for a people who lived justly and moderately in sex and thus were not afflicted with famine or disease (*Recognitions*, 8, 48).

The learned Origen, prevented from seeking martyrdom by his mother in 202, succeeded Clement as head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. Fasts, vigils, and poverty he reinforced with self-castration, which he understood Matthew 19:12 as recommending. Deposed as head of the school, he left Alexandria in 231 for Caesarea, where he founded a rival school. He succumbed a few days after being released from torture during the persecution of 250. Some of his many works, including commentaries on almost every book of the Bible emphasizing the allegorical interpretation open only to the enlightened, were destroyed after their condemnation in 400.

From 235 to 284 the "Thirty Tyrants" rapidly succeeded one another as emperors of Rome, only one dying peacefully, to the accompaniment of invasions, plagues, and famines. These catastrophes undermined trade and cities' wealth, particularly in the west, causing *gymnasia*, *bathhouses*, and *symposia* to diminish or fail. Thus these disasters undermined *pederasty* while driving the majority to seek salvation in Oriental mystery religions. In desperation several tyrants unleashed great persecutions against the scapegoat Christians.

In 257 St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, opined that the plague had the merit of letting Christian virgins die intact, but no Christian invoked medical arguments about the benefits of virginity or (as frequently among late pagan physicians) of moderation. The third-century forgeries made by a Syriac author but ascribed to St. Clement, bishop of Rome, worried about the abuses and perils from unmarried females besetting the celibate male virgin traveling from one community to another.

The Coptic St. Anthony (ca. 251–356), father of Christian monasticism, gave away his inheritance at the age of 20 and devoted himself to asceticism, retiring first into a tomb and then in 285 into the desert, in both of which he fought with hordes of demons. When the Devil failed to seduce him alone in the guise of a woman, he reappeared as a black boy. Around 305 Anthony organized the community of hermits he had attracted under a loose rule. He lent Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, who wrote St. Anthony's life, crucial support against a priest of Alexandria, Arius, founder of the greatest Trinitarian *heresy*. The end of the persecutions gave ascetics the glory formerly gained by martyrs for the faith and spawned Christian *monasticism*. Like St. Anthony, other anchorites found sexual desire the most difficult bodily urge to control and ordained severe fasts to weaken it. The success of monasticism increased the sexual negativism of the rest of the church.

Converted after his discharge from the army in 313, the Copt St. Pachomius (ca. 290–346) founded a monastery near the Nile in the Thebaid about 320. By his death he ruled over 9 such institutions for men and 2 for women as abbot general. His rule, the first for cenobites, influenced those of St. Basil, John Cassian, Caesarius of Arles, and Benedict, as well as that, anonymous, of "the Master." Pachomius said that "no monk may sleep on the mattress of another" (Ch. 40) or come

closer to one another "whether sitting or standing" than one cubit (about 18 inches) when they had meals together. It was only about 500 in Gaul that a common dormitory was instituted in place of the solitary cells (Benedict, Ch. 22) after the old building burned.

The Cappadocian Fathers defined orthodoxy and defended it against the Arian heresy in the mid-fourth century: Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. St. Basil the Great, brother of Gregory of Nyssa, forsook the world, having received a classical education in Constantinople and Athens, where he had been a fellow student with Julian the Apostate under the pagan rhetorician Libanius. After a stint with ascetics in Syria and Egypt, he settled as a hermit in Pontus, renewing his friendship with Gregory of Nazianzus, third of the Cappadocian fathers. In 370 Basil became bishop of Caesarea, a post earlier held by Eusebius, the friend and biographer of emperor Constantine the Great and historian of the church (ca. 260–ca. 340). After 313, as a moderate Arian rather than a puritan, Eusebius advised Constantine's Arian sons, who first decreed capital punishment for passive homosexuality in 342, two years after their mentor's death. Basil was much influenced by Origen, most brilliant of the theologians of Alexandria, which remained an intellectual center even after Christians murdered Hypatia and began to burn books. Basil continued to fight the Arians and also composed the liturgy still used by the Eastern church. His monastic rule, though strict, eschewed the more extreme austerities of the hermits of the desert. As revised by St. Theodore of Studios (died 862), Basil's rule still regulates Orthodox monasteries.

First of the pillar ascetics, St. Simeon Stylites (ca. 390–459) lived on a column for about 40 years working miracles near Antioch. These "athletes for Christ" mortified the body more than any Olympic athlete improved his, but the lack of discipline of Simeon and other

hermits, and scandals about them, encouraged the growth of monasteries. In these, repression of homosexuality became an obsession.

With Eusebius, Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria (who authored the Nicene Creed against the followers of Arius), and the Cappadocian fathers, John Chrysostom, the most influential of the Desert Fathers, closes the list of the most important Greek Fathers. He also set in motion the intensifying of Christian homophobia from Jesus' "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" to "How many hells shall be enough for such [sodomites]?" in Homily IV on Romans 1:26–27, and to the assertion of Luca da Penne (ca. 1320–ca. 1390) that "sodomy is worse than murder" because the murderer seeks to destroy only a single human being, but the sodomite means to destroy the entire human race by frustrating its reproduction.

Latin Fathers. Spreading westwards, the Church won its earliest converts among urban Jewish and Greek communities. All the early bishops of Rome were Greek. The long struggle with the synagogues, which St. Paul had begun in the heartland of Christendom, Asia Minor, continued in Rome and North Africa, leaving a stain of anti-Judaism in Christianity. Like the eastern churches, the western ones flourished in cities rather than in the countryside and drew non-Jewish or non-Greek converts more often from oppressed urban minorities: the poor, women, and slaves. The first surviving Christian writing in Latin was Tertullian's *Apologeticum* of 197. The Latin church was thus later than and modeled on the Greek, and the earliest translation of the Gospels or Epistles from Greek to Latin was done in North Africa at the end of the second century (the so-called *Afra*).

Just as Latin Christians borrowed anti-Judaism from Greeks, who had long clashed with them in Alexandria, as well as from Copts and Armenians, oppressed ethnic minorities in the east whose urban

representatives turned early and eagerly to Christianity, they also borrowed homophobia from the Jews which they reinforced with the hostility of Rome to effeminacy. The disapprobation of the ancient Romans, which persisted under the Roman emperors, helped the Catholic Church to become even more homophobic than the Orthodox, which grew upon the more tolerant soil of ancient Greece.

Made head of the church in Lyons in 177 after the martyrdom of its bishop Pothinus, St. Irenaeus attacked Gnosticism, especially as advanced and practiced by Valentinus. Perhaps the most influential Gnostic, Valentinus was said to recommend free love for the "pneumatics," spiritual men freed from the Law by *gnosis*. Unlike his eastern contemporary Clement of Alexandria, who condemned sodomy as "against nature," a Greek concept, and brandished other Platonic arguments, Irenaeus fought Gnosticism by emphasizing tradition, the canon of Scriptures, and the episcopate.

Reared a pagan in Carthage and educated in liberal arts and law, Tertullian, father of Latin theology, converted in 197 but eventually joined the Montanist sect. His apologies and controversial and ascetic tracts were written in Latin and occasionally in Greek. He rebutted accusations of immorality, including homosexuality and cannibalism. Ironically, Christians were soon to hurl these charges against heretics. Tertullian demanded separation from pagan society to escape its immorality and idolatry. He may have edited the *Passion* of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, whose virginity he made central. Following Irenaeus in stressing tradition and attacking the Valentinians, he pessimistically dwelt on the Fall and original sin. Eschatological expectations led him to asceticism and perfectionism. In the 220s in *De pudicitia*, as a Montanist he condemned Pope Callistus' and a bishop of Carthage's laxity toward sexual sinners, urging a legalistic system of rewards and

punishments. He probably used a Latin version of the Bible and, though influenced by Stoicism, stressed the literal and historical interpretation of revelation. Another Latin author, probably Novatian, wrote about 250: "Virginity makes itself equal to the angels."

Son of the Pretorian Prefect of Gaul, St. Ambrose, after practicing law and being governor, became bishop of Milan in 374. First of the four Latin "Doctors of the Church" with Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, this famous preacher and upholder of orthodoxy against pagans and Arians converted St. Augustine in 386. A familiar of emperors, as Bishop of Milan, which had replaced Rome as the Western capital, Ambrose upheld the independence of the church and made Theodosius the Great, who in 390 issued the second imperial law ordering death for homosexuality, do penance for a massacre at Thessalonica. Knowing the works of Cicero and other Latin thinkers, as well as Greek Christians, many of whose ideas he introduced to westerners, Ambrose wrote a treatise on clerical ethics, *De Officiis*, which encouraged asceticism and Italian monasticism.

After studying at Rome, St. Jerome devoted himself to asceticism with friends in his native Aquileia. In 374 he departed for Palestine but tarried at Antioch for further study before retreating as a hermit to the Syrian desert for 4 or 5 years, during which he learned Hebrew. Back in Rome, he was secretary to Pope Damasus, who ordered him to revise the Latin text of the Bible on the basis of the Hebrew and Greek originals. Finally settling in a monastery in Bethlehem, Jerome dedicated his life to study. The best patristic scholar, he produced many commentaries on the books of the Bible, of which his Latin version became authoritative in the Western church (in a late medieval edition known as the Vulgate). Attacking heretics, he advised extreme asceticism in *Against Helvidius* and *Against Jovinian*.

He asserted that "Christ and Mary were both virgins, and this consecrated the pattern of virginity for both sexes."

St. Augustine, who towered over all the Greek and Latin fathers, developed doctrines that held sway throughout the Dark Ages, were challenged and modified by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, but revived again by Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Leaning heavily on the Old Testament and rejecting Manichaeism to which Augustine had once adhered, he taught that all non-procreative modes of sexual gratification were wrong because pleasure was their sole object.

St. Benedict of Nursia withdrew from the licentiousness at Rome, where he was educated, for a cave at Subiaco. He organized the monks attracted to his hermitage into twelve monasteries but in 525 moved to Monte Cassino where the "Patriarch of Western Monasticism" composed his rule by altering and shortening "The Rule of the Master" and also drawing freely upon those of Sts. Basil, John Cassian, and Augustine. Chapter 22 of his Rule prescribed that monks should sleep in separate beds, clothed and with lights burning in the dormitory; the young men were not to sleep next to one another but separated by the cots of elders.

From a noble family that fled Cartagena when it was destroyed by the Arian Goths, St. Isidore (d. 636), who had entered a monastery ca. 589, succeeded his brother as Archbishop of Seville in 600. Presiding over several councils in Visigothic Spain, the only Germanic realm whose laws punished homosexual acts, he founded schools and convents and tried to convert Jews. His often fanciful *Etymologies* (such as *miles quia nil molle faciat*, "miles [soldier] because he does nothing molle [effeminate]") became the encyclopedia of the Dark Ages. In his theological writings, Isidore borrowed from Augustine and Gregory the Great, condemning non-procreative sexuality and approving mar-

riage hesitantly and solely for the begetting of children.

Adopted *in toto* from such Hellenistic Jewish authors as Philo Judaeus and Flavius Josephus, the homophobia of the early fathers was never contradicted or opposed by any Christian thinker accepted as an authority by later generations. The Third Lateran Council in 1179 prescribed for sodomitical clerics only degradation or penitential confinement in a monastery. This was carried out according to canon law, but secular legislation under clerical influence usually prescribed burning alive. Gratian in the *Decretals* devoted little space to homosexual and other "unnatural" sex acts but clearly considered such sins more heinous than fornication or adultery. The final triumph of homophobic thought and practice within the Western church occurred only in the thirteenth century, when at the Fourth Lateran Council under Pope Innocent III (1215) the Church attained its all-time height of power and influence over European society. From the close of the century onward, all expression of homosexual feeling and activity was forbidden and penalized not just by criminal sanctions, but by ostracism and social infamy.

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PEDERASTY

Pederasty is the erotic relationship between an adult male and a boy, generally one between the ages of twelve and seventeen, in which the older partner is attracted to the younger one who re-