

# MONASTIC THEOLOGY EAST AND WEST

Patristic Theology

## ANTHONY OF THE DESERT

- *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius
- Letters

## APOTHEGMATA PATRUM

- *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

## EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN (306-373)

- Hymns
- Homilies

## EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

- Life & context
  - Born in Pontus c. 345, died in the Egyptian desert in 399.
  - Student of Gregory of Nazianzus
  - Lived in Constantinople, then Jerusalem, then the Egyptian desert
  - Condemned with Origen and Didymus the Blind in 6c
- Major works
  - Gnostic chapters
  - Praktikos
  - Ad Monachos
  - Chapters on Prayer
- Doctrine
  - Descent of the logikoi because of sin
  - Ascent of the logikoi in redemption
  - Praktike
    - Overcoming the logismoi
  - Physike
    - Meditating on the world
  - Theologike
    - Pure Prayer
- "First of all pray to be purified from your passions. Secondly, pray to be delivered from ignorance. Thirdly, pray to be freed from all temptation and abandonment." (Prayer, 37)
- "To the extent that you still give attention to the values of the body, and your mind concerns itself with the amenities of life, you have not yet seen the place of prayer. Rather the happiness of this way is still far off." (Prayer, 152)

## JOHN CASSIAN

- 360-435
- *Institutes*
- *Conferences*
- *On the Incarnation against Nestorius*

## MACARIAN HOMILIES (4TH CENTURY)

- Characteristics
  - Fourth century collection, once thought to be by Macarius the Great of Egypt
  - Now (non-)attributed to an author known as Pseudo-Macarius
  - Connection with the Cappadocians
  - Syrian context
- Doctrine
  - Self-renunciation
  - Human goodness
  - Sin as damaging the image of God
  - Free will
  - Spiritual combat
    - Humility
    - Praxis
    - Penthos
    - Diakrisis
    - Sin and grace together in a person
    - Unceasing prayer
    - The heart
  - Progress in Holiness
    - Indwelling of the Spirit
    - Mystical union with Jesus
    - Importance of the body
    - Role of the heart
    - Spiritual senses
    - Incompleteness of the person without God

## BENEDICT OF NURSIA

- 480-543
- *Rule of St. Benedict*
  - Based on the Rule of the Master
- Details of his life known from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*

## ISAAC THE SYRIAN

### LIFE

- East Syrian
- Perhaps a native of Beth Katraya or Bet Qatraye on the Persian Gulf, near present-day Bahrain
- Bishop of Nineveh somewhere between 660-680 for about five months
- Buried at the monastery of Rabban Shabur in present-day Iran near the Persian Gulf
- Nestorian by ecclesial context

## STAGES IN SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

### FIRST STEP IS CONTROL OF THE BODY AND CONQUERING OF THE PASSIONS

- Penitence
  - conversion of the will

- the gateway of grace
- Progress in holiness is a spiritual struggle or contest. By focusing on God, then we are purified. We must always be vigilant. (Lossky, *Mystical*, 202)
- "Repentance is fitting at all times and for all persons. To sinners as well as to the righteous who look for salvation. There are no bounds to perfection, for even the perfection of the most perfect is naught but imperfection. Hence, until the moment of death neither the time nor the works of repentance can ever be complete." (quoted in Lossky, *Mystical*, 204)

#### SECOND STEP HAS TWO PARTS:

- Contemplating God's wisdom rather than creation and the welling up of God's thoughts within us (13)
  - purification (liberation from the passions)
  - The goal is purity of heart, contemplation, which is achieved through praxis (Lossky, *Mystical*, 203)
  - One then arrives at a limpidity of heart (14)
    - The spiritual light takes the place of knowledge (15)
- Final stage is a foretaste of resurrection: "wonder in God" (15)
  - perfection (acquisition of perfect love) (Lossky, *Mystical*, 204)

#### ANTHROPOLOGY

- Tripartite division: body, soul, spirit

#### MERCY

- "And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for all creation, for men, for birds, for animals and even for demons." (St. Isaac of Nineveh on Ascetical Life (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 12.

#### HEART

- Within the heart, deeper than sin, is the place where grace works (quoted in Lossky, *Mystical*, 106)
- Humans are created, like the angels, in a special creative act of God that is different from his way of creating the rest of the world (Lossky, *Mystical*, 107-8)

#### DESIRE AND WONDER

- The person permeated by love has a burning desire for all creatures: "for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons" (quoted in Lossky, *Mystical*, 111)

#### WORLD

- The soul journeys in the "world", the place of the passions and demons, outside itself, and must be drawn back into itself (Lossky, *Mystical*, 199-200)