

## UNIT 2C: TRADITION

### 54: The Nicene Fathers

(and a few notable heretics)

4th Century Turmoil

#### Arius, the great heresiarch (c. 250-336)

In Christian history. Arius is the archetypal heretic for two connected reasons. Firstly, his heresy struck right at the heart of the Gospel. By denying the divinity of Christ he fatally undermined God's personal intervention for the salvation of the human race. This denial of the divinity of Christ was thrown down publicly as a gauntlet to the Church with Arius' assertion that Christ "has nothing proper to God in his essential property, for neither is he equal nor yet consubstantial with him."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, his provocative teaching, which gained considerable following in the Christian East of the fourth century, came at a time when the Church's mature reflection on the person of Christ was poised to make significant advances. In this respect, his antagonism to Orthodoxy made the Church stronger and called forth strong refutation from some fathers who have made a lasting impression in Christian history, notably the great St Athanasius of Alexandria and the three Cappadocian fathers—St Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Arius was probably a Libyan by birth and a pupil of Lucian of Antioch. Lucian was a subordinationist in his Christology—that is, Lucian "claimed that the Father alone was God in the fullest sense, that the Son was a lesser expression of God, and the Spirit a still more diminished expression of the Son."<sup>2</sup> Like many before him in the first three

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<sup>1</sup> Arius, *Thalia* (or *Banquet*) quoted by Athanasius, *On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleuceia*, 15 in J. Stevenson (Ed.), *A New Eusebius: Documents illustrating the history of the Church to AD 337*, revised by W. H. C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 330. Stevenson notes that Arius regarded "the true faith as entrusted to inspired teachers and not necessarily to the appointed officials of the Church" p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity: An Illustrated History of 2,000 Years of the Christian Faith* (London: Quercus, 2007), p. 68.

Christian centuries, he tended to interpret the unoriginate monarchy of the Father as grounds for believing that only the Father is God in what he defined and took to be the proper and full sense of that reference. Lucian, however, did not stand at the crossroads of Christian history in the way that his pupil was to stand. We remember Arius not Lucian on account of the former's successful popularisation of his doctrines, often not in lectures but in popular songs.

By the time Arius came to public prominence as a presbyter in Alexandria in later life he had already gained a troubled reputation for involvement in schismatic activities. All this was to pale into insignificance, however, compared with his falling out with his bishop, St Alexander (d. 328), and later, Alexander's young deacon St Athanasius (c. 296-373), on the issue of the origin of Christ. For Arius, since one could only speak of "God" as God—a simple oneness of person—and indeed only use the word "Father" in a relational and not an ontological sense, the Son of God had to be a created being, not God. For Arius, the proof text of this assertion was Proverbs 8:22: "The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways, for the sake of his works."<sup>3</sup> Although the Son existed before his human birth, as the Logos he was still nonetheless a created being, albeit before the Cosmos. In a statement of faith to Alexander, Arius used the now famous phrase that Christ "was not before he was begotten." Arius saw Christ as an exalted spiritual being, a sort of intermediary between God (as Father) and humanity, but in Arius' theology when Christ acted it was not God acting directly, only his exalted created Agent.

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<sup>3</sup> Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p.29. The translation is drawn from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, edited by Albert Pietersa & Benjamin G. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), available free online at: [www.ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/](http://www.ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/).

We see a similar teaching today in the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Indeed, even some liberal Protestants have tried to rehabilitate Arius!<sup>4</sup> The significance of Arius and his danger to the Church lay in his ability to recruit others to this cause, notably Eusebius of Nicomedia who probably caused more problems than Arius himself in the ongoing disputes, and was regarded by J. N. D. Kelly as “the political tactician of the group.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there was a lack of clarity in the use of language by all sides at the outset which could easily mislead when left unchallenged.

### **After Arius - the Nicene Fathers - St. Athanasius and the Cappadocians**

The plausibility of the Arian position arose from a highly selective use of Scripture; and as Alexander noted, this often involved the claim that the sufferings and humiliation of Christ precluded his divine status. This was a self-serving argument as there was no willingness in the Arian view to distinguish the Father and the co-eternal Son in respect of suffering and the self-emptying kenosis of the Incarnation. The appropriate language to express this distinction whilst maintaining the unity of the God had to wait upon the great Council of Nicaea—the first ecumenically convened, by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great. By the time this Council gathered in Nicaea in 325 the troublesome Arius had built up followers who morphed into a movement of strangulating Arianism which was to trouble the Church beyond the Council right the way through the fourth century. Emperors and bishops alike succumbed to this heresy; and St Athanasius, the great architect of Nicaea, spent much of his ecclesiastical life in exile.

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<sup>4</sup> See Maurice Wiles and the “Myth of God Incarnate” School summarised at: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1491502/The-Rev-Professor-Maurice-Wiles.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1491502/The-Rev-Professor-Maurice-Wiles.html). Of particular note is Wiles’ study of the history of Arianism, *Archetypal Heresy* (1996).

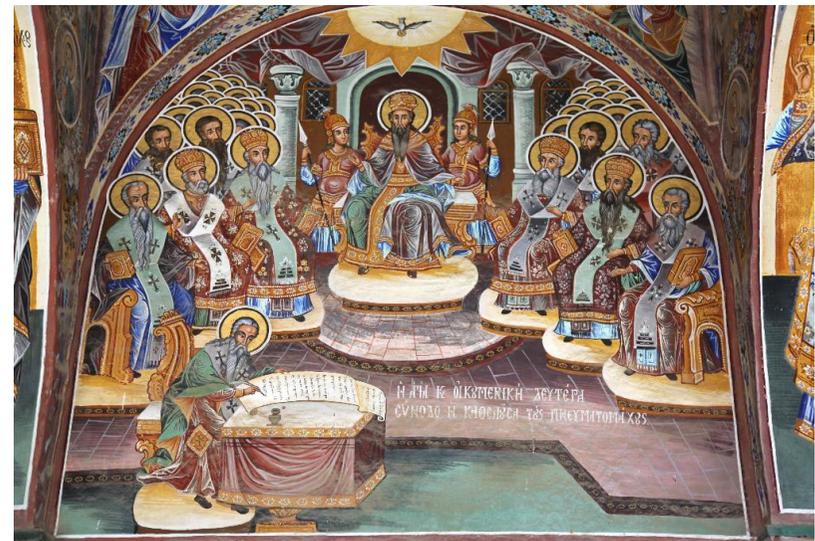
<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth Revised Edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977), p. 227. For further discussion of the teaching of Arius, see Kelly, pp. 226-231, Hart, pp. 70-72 and especially John Behr, *The Nicene Faith, Parts 1 and 2*, passim. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004).

Although the First Council excluded and condemned Arian teaching, it took hard and long work over many years to defeat it finally. After the death of Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and especially St Gregory the Theologian (329-389) were among those who were able to continue his work and think through the Church's faith clearly, using appropriate language to express it and defend it. A new vocabulary had to be invented though; and this sometimes upset more conservative but sympathetic bishops who were unwilling to use words that were not to be found in the Scriptures themselves. Classically, this was the issue at the First Council in the use of the key but novel term, *homoousios* indicating that the Father and the Son were of the same essence/substance). Nonetheless, this was accepted by the Orthodox. Likewise, the Cappadocians, in seeking to frame words that could accommodate the Triadic unity of God, came up with *hypostasis*, which can only be very loosely translated “person” because “person” does not imply “individual” as that would imply tritheism in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are understood to be three separate and distinct gods.

In the First Ecumenical Council the main issue was Christological. Simply put, was Jesus God or not? The use of *homoousios* and all the divine prerogatives attaching to the Son in the opening phrases of the Nicene Creed established the Orthodox position, which had prevailed from the beginning of the Church, but not in a mature and reflective theological expression. However, as with most terse definitions, there was sufficient ambiguity in the Council's Creed for the so-called semi-Arians (who claimed that the Son was LIKE unto the Father in his being), to continue the fight beyond the Council for the remainder of the century. Indeed, the Arian party itself polarised and split, with the extremist Anomoeans following the teaching of Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. 394), who supposed Christ to be like unto the

Father but only morally. Unsurprisingly, therefore, they baptised in the name of “the Creator and the death of Christ”—not the Trinity.

By the time the First Council of Constantinople met in 381—the Second Ecumenical Council of the Church—the Cappadocian fathers had persuasively argued for “consubstantiality” as the characteristic mark of Monotheism in a Trinitarian schema. Only the more conservative St Basil the Great (330-379) in his refutations of the “Arians of the Spirit”—the Pneumatichians or “Spirit-fighters”—was reluctant to extend this creedal language in exactly the same way to the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, his own arguments for the divinity of the Spirit in his great work *On the Holy Spirit* and the creedal formulae added by the Second Council in relation to the third person of the Trinity affirmed His consubstantiality as well, albeit implicitly in the actual wording.



## The First and Second Ecumenical Councils Compared

| First Council of Nicea (325)  | First Council of Constantinople (381)  |
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| We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.  | We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of <i>heaven and earth</i> , and of all things visible and invisible.  |
| And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;  | And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, <i>begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons)</i> , Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;                           |
| By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth];   | by whom all things were made;  |
| Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;  | who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate <i>by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary</i> , and was made man;  |
| He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;   | <i>he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate</i> , and suffered, <i>and was buried</i> , and the third day he rose again, <i>according to the Scriptures</i> , and ascended into heaven, <i>and sitteth on the right hand of the Father</i> ; |
| From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  | from thence he shall come again, <i>with glory</i> , to judge the quick and the dead;  |
|   | <i>whose kingdom shall have no end.</i>  |
| And in the Holy Ghost.  | And in the Holy Ghost, <i>the Lord and Giver of life</i> , who <i>proceedeth from the Father</i> , who <i>with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified</i> , who <i>spake by the prophets</i> .                               |
|   | <i>In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.</i>   |
| [But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not,' and 'He was not before he was made,' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.] |  |

It was the teaching of St Gregory of Nazianzus that developed a consistent Trinitarian account of these questions; and it was St Gregory's success in commending this to the Church as *the* Orthodox doctrine of God, "par excellence" that won him the rare title of "The Theologian"—a title shared only with St John the Theologian and St Simeon the New Theologian—and set the course of the Church's confession of faith thereafter undisturbed. This, the saint achieved notwithstanding his basic dislike of the hurly burly and bickering of ecclesiastical affairs at this level. It was his experience of the Second Ecumenical Council and its less edifying aspects that prompted him to dismiss the noisy and

contentious participants as cackling geese!<sup>6</sup> Arianism itself lingered on a little longer in the west amongst the Germanic tribes, but within a few generations it was a spent force, until that is, it re-emerged in the west after the Enlightenment in different forms in certain Protestant sects, one now provocatively called the “Arian Catholic Church”! Tout ca change, tout c'est la meme chose!

In seeking to understand “the prevailing mindset of the fourth-century Church,” David Bentley Hart has suggested: For the theologians of that time, salvation meant an intimate and immediate union with God, by which the human being would literally be ‘divinized’: that is, made to become (in the language of 2 Peter 1:4) a partaker of the divine nature—not, of course to become God (*ho Theos*), but to become divine (*theios* or *theos*). They believed that Christ had assumed human form so as to free humanity from bondage to death and make it capable of a direct indwelling of the divine presence. This has always remained the explicit teaching of the Eastern Churches. . . .<sup>7</sup>

The reality that today each of us as Orthodox Christians can continue to seek *theosis* in our own lives, as well as to help build Orthodox communities that empower its members to attain *theosis*, indicating that the theological controversies of the fourth century still have considerable meaning in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>6</sup> The quotation is from McGuckin, p. 82. For an extensive study of the theology of St Gregory, see Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Part Two* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), Chapter 3, pp. 325-408.

<sup>7</sup> Hart, p. 72.

Furthermore, as Father John Behr points out in the *Nicene Faith: Part 1*, the fourth century was “the period in which Christianity became Nicene Christianity.”<sup>8</sup> The Creed of the First Council of Constantinople has been described as “the final, defining monument of the fourth century” and is “one of the few threads by which the tattered fragments of the divided robe of Christendom are held together.” This is the Creed of the Christianity we continue to believe and celebrate today as Orthodox Christians with conviction and prayer.

Let us now consider how a few notable theologians, beginning with St John Chrysostom, lived and preached and wrote in the midst of this fourth century turmoil.

### **St. John Chrysostom (c. 345-407)<sup>9</sup>**

St John Chrysostom lived through the great Arian upheavals but seems to have taken little if no part in the resolution of the issues albeit explicitly endorsing the “homoousios” formula and Cappadocian theology generally throughout his work. Nonetheless, as an Antiochian in origin and method, he simultaneously appeals to the indigenous mild semi-Arians by using such terms as “equal in honour and authority” when articulating the unity of the hypostases. As noted above, St Basil used similar conciliatory language in his defence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit against his

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<sup>8</sup> Behr, p. xv. The first quotation is from Father Behr; and he quotes the second from J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 1972; 3rd edition), p. 296

<sup>9</sup> A detailed examination of the life and work of St. John Chrysostom may be found at: <https://youtu.be/Y170cjU-W5c> - a lecture given by the Revd Fr Dr Alexander Tefft at the Annual Conference of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland on Tuesday 24th May 2016.

detractors, the Pneumatochians. Chrysostom's lasting contribution to the Church, however, equally honoured in west and east, was as a Biblical exegete, interpreter and preacher. In this he was perhaps unparalleled in Christian history in terms of the volume and quality of his work; and the name "Chrysostomos" means "Golden Mouth."<sup>10</sup> It is his theological and pastoral contribution that is of primary interest here, so consider first a broad outline of his life and times.<sup>11</sup>

St John was born in Antioch, the son of a civil servant. His father died young and his mother Anthusa ensured that he had an excellent education probably at the feet of the great sophist Libanius. He studied theology under Diodore and Meletius, his bishop; both men great and accomplished Biblical theologians. After his ordination as priest in 386 he preached regularly in the cathedral at Antioch. As an Antiochian theologian, he favoured the plain meaning of Scripture in its historical context which sometimes put him at odds with those in the Alexandrian school who made extensive use of allegory. The practical application of Scripture came readily and easily to him; and this perhaps explains why his uncompromising prophetic ministry, particularly as Archbishop of Constantinople to which high office he was elevated, caused him no little trouble amongst the rich, the powerful and the envious. His sermons were enormously popular amongst ordinary people and their delivery in church were lively affairs with applause often breaking out even if he rebuked this practice himself. Exiled for a second time in the bitter midwinter cold on a forced march to the Black Sea, he died a fearless martyr bishop. His last words were "Glory be to God for all things."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Frederica Mathewes-Green, "Foreword" to St John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter: The Meaning of First Corinthians 13* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), p. vii.

<sup>11</sup> The following discussion is based largely upon the insights of McGuckin, pp. 190-191.

<sup>12</sup> Mathewes-Green, p. x.

St John Chrysostom became a senior hierarch and Doctor of the Church; and his significance amongst the fathers lies in his practical pastoral ministry which combined liturgical reform (he adapted the Liturgy of St Basil for use in Constantinople) with an emphasis on Christian education and prophetic application. The “golden-mouthed” truly set a gold standard for Biblical commentary and preaching for centuries to come; and his works are still widely read today.<sup>13</sup> He saw himself as a teacher who was communicating to many people often through short, set sermons of about 15 minutes, carefully written out in full and delivered from the previously prepared text.<sup>14</sup>

St John Chrysostom was a great admirer of the life and preaching of St Paul. For example, writing of 1 Cor 13:4 (“Love is patient, love is kind”), he preached:

Don’t pass hastily by the things [St Paul] has spoken, my friends, but examine each one of them with care, so that you may know the treasure that is in the thing as well as the art of the painter himself. Consider, for example—his point of departure—what Paul proposes as the cause of all love’s excellence. What is it? Patience. Patience is the root of all self-denial. . . . As a spark falling into the deep [water] does not injure [or indure?] but is easily quenched, so on a patient soul whatever unexpected thing falls, it vanishes rapidly; the soul is not disturbed.<sup>15</sup>

In his numerous commentaries on the Psalms, St John Chrysostom was equally inspiring. For example, of Psalm 4:1 (“When I would call, the God of my righteousness listened to me”) he wrote:

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<sup>13</sup> See especially the translations into modern English by Robert Charles Hill published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press, which include St John Chrysostom’s *Commentary on the Psalms* 2 vols. (1998), *Spiritual Gems from the Book of Psalms* (2004) and *Spiritual Gems from the Gospel of Matthew* (2004). Also of note is Father Panayiotis Papageorgiou’s translation: of St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013) and St John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter: The Meaning of First Corinthians 13* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Graham Neville, “Introduction” to St John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* (Crestwood: NY, 1977), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> *The Love Chapter: The Meaning of First Corinthians 13*, pp. 31-32.

Do you see how easy it is? I mean, in the case of human beings the one who brings a plea to anyone needs to have oratorical skills and be capable of flattering all the big man's retinue, and give thought to many other details so as to be acceptable. In this case, by contrast [in calling upon God] there is need of nothing except a sober attitude, with no obstacle to being close to God. 'I am a God who is nearby, and not a God who is far off' (Jer 23:23), remember. Being far away is on our side; He, after all, is always close by.<sup>16</sup>

St John Chrysostom certainly knew how to encourage listeners to share his own closeness to God.

### **The Syriac Fathers - St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373)<sup>17</sup>**

The patrimony of the Church of Antioch in its saints is well known (or at least it should be ... <https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://www.antiochcentre.net/pdf/Saints.pdf> ) and in this particular period of the 4th century its key contribution was in the Arian controversies. It was, after all, the Syriac fathers, Eustathius, Meletius of Antioch and Eusebius of Samosata who prepared the next generation of theologians—St Basil the Great, St Gregory Nazianzus (The Theologian) and Diodore of Tarsus—to fight for Nicæan Orthodoxy against an Arianism resurgent after the First Ecumenical Council. There were other fathers, however, who joined the fray, but who used very different

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<sup>16</sup> *Spiritual Gems from the Book of Psalms*, pp. 7-8. The quotation of Psalm 4:1 is from the Septuagint translation set out in Note 3 above.

<sup>17</sup> A detailed examination of the life and work of St. Ephrem the Syrian may be found at: <https://youtu.be/45ib9TAorFc> - a lecture given by the Revd Fr Jonathan Hemmings at the Annual Conference of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland on Tuesday 24th May 2016.

methods to uphold the truth, with none greater in the Syriac tradition perhaps than St Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373).

St Ephrem was a poet theologian. His gift, infused by the Spirit, was to teach and celebrate the Orthodox faith and life through sublime verse and hymns, a refreshing complement to more familiar methods of argumentation. He has been insightfully described as “a symbolic-poet-theologian entranced with the paradox of the Incarnation of the ineffable God and with the Divine presence in Nature and Scripture.”<sup>18</sup> Employing a profusion of biblical symbols and themes, he upheld Orthodoxy against the onslaught of Manicheism, Gnosticism, Arianism and Occultism. His poetry and hymnography was translated into Greek and profoundly influenced St. Romanos the Melodist, that other great singer of the faith.

When the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire moved west in 363, St Ephrem moved with his community from Nisibis to Edessa in which city the great tradition of Eastern Syriac Christianity continued to flourish until the depredations of Islam began to take their toll from the 7th century onwards. At Odessa, St Ephrem became a deacon of his local church. However, it is important to appreciate the unity of his ascetic life and his theology. His translator, Kathleen McVey has written that:

Neither a member of a monastic community nor a hermit, he was instead an ascetic of a peculiarly Syrian sort, an *ybydy*, a hermit, a solitary or ‘single’ one, a celibate living in the ordinary Christian congregation as the special representative of Christ, the ‘Only-begotten.’ In the *Hymns on Virginity and the Symbols of the Lord* he draws out

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<sup>18</sup> Kathleen E. McVey, “Foreword,” *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. xi.

the theological implications of this understanding of the ascetic life and clarifies its relation to his symbolic theology.<sup>19</sup>

The first of those hymns “begins with the image of the body as garment and exhorts the virgin to put off the garment of the old, pre-baptismal self.”<sup>20</sup> The power of St Ephrem’s approach to life is evident in Hymn 1:

O body, strip off the utterly hateful old man,/ lest he wear out again the new [garment] you put on when you were baptized./ . . . O body, obey my advice; strip him off by [your] way of life,/ lest he put you on by [his] habits. /For by baptism our Lord made new your old age—/ He, the Carpenter of life, Who by His blood formed and built a temple for His dwelling./ Do not allow that old man/to dwell in the renewed temple./ O body, if you have God live in your Temple,/ you will also become His royal palace.

This remains outstanding advice for anyone today who is a single person or for married couples living chastely. Many of St Ephrem’s admonitions apply to those who are not living a celibate life:

Fear wine that exposed the honourable Noah victorious in his generation./ A handful of wine prevailed over him who could prevail over the flood of water./ This one [i.e. Noah] whom the Deluge had not vanquished outwardly, wine vanquished inwardly./ The wine that exposed [and] cast down Noah, the head of families—how much more will it conquer you, solitary woman!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, p. xi. St Ephrem’s 52 Hymns on Virginitly and the Symbols of the Lord has been translated in full by McVey on pp. 259-468.

<sup>20</sup> McVey, p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> Hymn 1, pp. 261-264.

St Ephrem died at the age of 67, while serving victims of the plague. In later years, his hymns and theology were studied and appreciated in many Eastern traditions—not only the Syriac, but also the Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian and later Arabic traditions.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion: Growing Up in Our Understanding of Christ**

Because of the prayers and insights of these theologians and of the Fathers of the first two Ecumenical Councils, by the end of the fourth century the person of Christ and His Mission was better understood and clearly defined. This had been a challenging rather than a comfortable experience; but the confusions of Arius did push the Church to understand better Christ and His Mission. What happened to the Church during the fourth century was astounding: The Church grew up in its understanding of Christ and the life that was expected of each member of the Church, especially its pastors and teachers. St John Chrysostom’s reflections on 1 Cor 13:11-12 apply not only to St Paul but to the Church itself. When the Church was young and only a child, it “spoke like a child . . . thought like a child . . . reasoned like a child;” so like the young Saul, the Church had “much to overcome.”<sup>23</sup> Before the formation and affirmation of The Nicene Creed, the apostles and disciples and many others certainly knew Christ; and yet, as St John Chrysostom reminds us “the present knowledge we may possess is at most partial.”<sup>24</sup>

The question that St John Chrysostom poses about Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians 13 still rings out today:

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<sup>22</sup> McVey, pp. 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> St John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter: The Meaning of First Corinthians 13* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> St John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter*, p. 71.

Do you see how, in Paul’s teachings, we learn all things by gradual addition? [As St Paul has written in 1 Cor 13:12,] ‘Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.’ . . . Paul didn’t have knowledge of God, but God made Himself known to Paul [Gal 1:15-16]. . . . Paul is saying: just as God first knew me, and came to find me, so I will hurry toward God much more than now.<sup>25</sup>

However, note the tension in the advice of both St Paul and St John Chrysostom. On the one hand, they are urging us to learn about Christ by “gradual addition,” yet they are also urging us to “hurry toward God” and the Second Coming of Christ. To learn gradually is to learn slowly, yet to hurry is to move and act quickly. Each of us need to learn how to balance slowness and quickness in our learning and experience of Christ, now and in expectation of the Age to Come. In free will, we each make our own personal decisions in the midst of different seasons of our life in Christ, at times moving slowly, at times quickly. The Nicene Fathers and their supporters have guided us well as we make our own decisions now about how to understand and serve Christ so many centuries later.

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<sup>25</sup> St John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter*, p. 72. The New Revised Standard translation of 1 Cor 13:12 given here is also present in the King James and New International translations. However, the Revised Standard translation is insightful: “Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.” Whatever Biblical translation is used, God knows and understands us; and we can reach out for that understanding both slowly and quickly throughout the different seasons of our lives.