



## SESSION 13: THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ECUMENICAL COUNCIL & THE CAPPADOCIANS – CONTENT

1. Between Constantine’s death in 337 and 360 there were more than 12 local councils, principally to deal with and avoid the extremes of Arianism and other heresies denying the divinity of the Son and/or the Holy Spirit.
2. Basil the Great was baptized in 357, one year after the death of Antony the Great. He immediately went to Egypt with Gregory of Nazianzus to examine monasticism there. After returning from Cappadocia, the sudden death of his brother Naucratus, and the encouragement of his sister Macrina (who had already established a monastery for women), Basil organized monasticism there, ultimately becoming known as the ‘Father of Eastern Monasticism’. There was a growing number of ascetics in Cappadocia, who held no allegiance to the Church or its bishops, who avoided meetings with the faithful, and who refused to work. This antisocial behavior was condemned at the Council of Gangra, and Basil saw the critical need for order and the potential power for good in the movement. He believed in communal (i.e. coenobitic) development, applying Acts 2:44-45 (“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”). He established hospitals and stressed love and care for the poor by monks as special representatives of Christ.
3. Basil probably finished his treatise On the Holy Spirit in 375, a tough-minded work directed at his old friends Eustathius of Sebaste, Basil on Ancyra and George of Laodicea, who were preaching that the Holy Spirit was subordinate. (see readings). He re-established unity among the non-Arians and introduced the term ‘consubstantial’. In his book, The Cappadocians, Anthony Meredith summarizes Basil’s teaching: “Every created spirit, human or angelic, was made with a natural spark of desire for God. The release and the realization of this in-built urge is not spontaneously achieved, but depends on the willingness of the created spirit to mould itself in conformity with the wishes of God and so to become like him. Finally, this likeness once achieved, the spirit is free to see the beauty which it had so long desired.”
4. Gregory of Nazianzus, who attributes his Christian upbringing to his mother Nonna, was ordained in 364 but tried to flee from being a priest, believing himself unworthy. Basil the Great made him bishop of Sasima in 372, but Gregory remained in Nazianzus. In 374 he delivered the homily at his father’s funeral, and in 375 he gave five orations in Constantinople which established him as a theologian and led to his being elected as Bishop of Constantinople. Opponents pointed out that by accepting this he had transgressed canon 6 of Nicea, which forbade translation of bishops. He immediately left Constantinople, returned to Nazianzus and spent the last ten years of his life in obscurity.
5. Gregory of Nazianzus was an uncompromising advocate of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, even chastising Basil upon occasion for not being strong enough on it. He was elegant in his defense of the humanity of Christ and of the co-eternal Trinity, saying, “Nothing so unites worshippers of God as agreement about God; nothing so sets them apart as difference of opinion.” He introduced the

term 'one nature, three hypostases'. No theologian prior to Gregory used the term 'theosis' with as much consistency and frequency as he. He said that theosis, or deification, is an agent of God and not we ourselves. He said that God is difficult to know, that we must learn to value the knowledge we have been given, and that had the nature of the Trinity been completely revealed in the beginning, it would have been too much for created intelligence to grasp. We need time to be introduced to the mystery of the Trinity (see reading on revelation). Gregory took this principle of progressive revelation from the Old Testament and developed it, probably because of the heretical crises surrounding him..

6. Gregory of Nazianzus said that God can only be a true light to those who are pure of heart, and that the preliminary to salvation is moral purity. He could be called the 'theologian of divine light' because he so often allegorized God as light (see reading on evil).
7. The historian J.H. Newman says, "Gregory disliked the routine intercourse of society; he disliked ecclesiastical business; he disliked publicity; he disliked strife; he felt his own imperfections; he feared to disgrace his profession, and to lose his hope." But note that Basil the Great died two years before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, that Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa were present at it, and that through their leadership at this Council the Church was unified.
8. Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of Basil the Great, was subdued in comparison to his brother's tempestuousness. He was the most biographical of the three – a writer and poet – telling us about the life of his sister Macrina, and that she was instrumental in inducing Basil to abandon life as a rhetorician and devote himself to poverty and manual labor. He was made Bishop of Nyssa in 372 to support Basil's position in Cappadocia. He was exiled by the Arians in 375 and returned in 378. He flourished after Basil's death in 379 and became one of the leaders of the Nicene party. He delivered the funeral oration for the Emperor's wife in 383 and reached the zenith of his influence as a theologian in 385.
9. Gregory of Nyssa said that desire, or eros, lies at the root of craving for God, and he searched for meaning in the Song of Solomon to justify its place in the Old Testament. Then he wrote the treatise On Virginity to displace physical love with spiritual. He said that the image of God is in us not so much by our intellect as by our freedom of will. But this unrestricted freedom accounts for the difference between God's initial designs for the human race and the actual situation. How can we be said in any meaningful way to be like God when the facts show otherwise? We are frail, short-lived, amoral if not perverse, and sexually differentiated into male and female. God is sexless, almighty, eternal, wise and good.
10. Basil wrote of divine nature and divine energy; Gregory of Nyssa emphasized this distinction. Energies are those activities of divine nature. Although we can have no knowledge of the divine nature of God, which lies beyond the reach of the human mind, we can acquire some knowledge of His wisdom as it expresses itself in the works of his creation. Centuries later this concept and doctrine would become a pillar of the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas.
11. Of the Eucharist, Gregory of Nyssa said, "Through the Eucharist the body comes into intimate union with its Savior... The Immortal Body, by entering the one who receives it, transforms his entire being into its own nature."

12. In contrast to Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa could be called the ‘theologian of divine darkness’. His teaching here is that Moses’ vision of God began with light; afterwards God spoke to him in a cloud. But when Moses rose higher and became more perfect, he saw God in the darkness. Our initial withdrawal from wrong and erroneous ideas of God is a transition from darkness to light. Next comes a closer awareness of hidden things, and by this the soul is guided through sense phenomena to the world of the invisible. And this awareness is a kind of cloud... which slowly guides the soul and accustoms it to look for what is hidden. Next...the soul enters the secret chamber of the divine knowledge and here she is cut off on all sides by the divine darkness. Now she leaves outside all that can be grasped by sense or by reason, and the only thing left for her contemplation is the invisible and the incomprehensible. And here God is. In the Eastern Church this concept of divine darkness apophatically (i.e. by stating or defining the negative) describes an impenetrable superabundance of the Divine Light that is God.
12. Gregory of Nyssa also wrote of restoration at the second coming of Christ, saying that everything will be restored to as it was before the fall of man. “For all wickedness is marked by the privation of good. It does not exist in its own right, nor is it observed to have substance...In the ultimate triumph of the power and goodness of God...it ought to follow that all things will be redeemed, there being nothing left to act as a counterpoise to divine will.” Although Gregory said in the end even the devil would be unable to resist the purposes of God and will be redeemed as a part of the general plan of restoration, this concept was never very popular and was not accepted by the Church
13. Gregory also said that virtuous life is like racing in the stadium, that human goodness is a continual process towards God. Read Hebrews 11 and 12:1-2.
14. In conclusion, these three Cappadocian Fathers were instrumental in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council and in unifying the Church while bringing an end to great, long-lasting heresies of subordination – of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Many of their concepts and images brought refinement of the theology of the Church in coming centuries. Their support and organization of monasticism in Asia Minor established it as an integral part of the Church until today.
15. As mentioned in the last session the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council in Constantinople established that the Bishop of Constantinople had ‘honor among equals’ second to the Bishop of Rome, and that the Roman Church rejected this, believing that such honor was related to the early Church’s relationship to Peter. Meanwhile, Roman bishops were gaining influence in the West, being seen as successors to Peter; they were also now being referred to as popes. Pope Damasus of Rome (366-384) openly rejected the Council’s action by referring to the Roman church as the ‘apostolic see’. His successor, Pope Siricius (384-389) expanded this influence and the Roman church’s authority in Gaul and Spain. Actually, Rome had been given honor because it was the ancient capital. As we have said before, Peter was in Antioch first as bishop, and probably there longer than in Rome. While his successors in Antioch could have claimed the same succession and authority, they did not.