



SESSION 14: THE CHURCH AT THE END OF THE 4TH CENTURY & SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM – CONTENT

1. Of course Christianity began in the Hebrew nation and in Jerusalem, but recall that during persecution by Jews many Christians left the city for Pella. As this intensified, and particularly when Roman legions sacked Jerusalem in 70AD, many Christians went to Antioch, leaving only a small community in the city. Syrian Antioch became a Christian center, as did Alexandria in Egypt, Rome, and ultimately Constantinople in the era of Constantine. Thus the establishment of four ‘patriarchies’ of the Church. (Constantine and his mother Helen had emphasized the importance of holy sites, and pilgrimages would soon lead to restoration of Jerusalem as the fifth patriarchate.)
2. Each center was led by a bishop or archbishop (i.e. patriarch); by the end of the 4th century the patriarch of Rome was known as ‘pope’, bestowed with ‘honor among equals’. Each patriarchal bishop presided at councils within his jurisdiction. Each bishop at any council had one vote on official matters; that is the meaning of ‘conciliar’ government in the Orthodox Church.
3. With the exception of the Alexandria, patriarchates were divided into ‘metropolia’ led by a metropolitan bishop, then into ‘dioceses’ which were divided into ‘provinces’ and those into ‘eparchies’. These subdivisions attest to the growth of Christianity and to the presence of many churches. In Egypt, there were no subdivisions and every bishop’s primate was the Archbishop of Alexandria.
4. Rome was the only apostolic see in the West, and it had moral and jurisdictional primacy over the churches in Italy, Gaul, Spain and Western Africa. Jerusalem was a simple bishopric under the Metropolitan of Caesarea, the civic center of Palestine. And although Constantinople had great influence, it was actually one of the dioceses of Thrace, led by the Bishop of Heraclea.
5. Collections of canons (i.e. Church rules or law) appeared; a set of 85 apostolic canons became the foundation for Orthodox canonical tradition. The 2nd Ecumenical Council had concentrated on canonical law of the East, and thus canonical law in the East and West began to differentiate. This ultimately gave rise to subordination of the state to the Church in the West, while in the East the Church embraced the whole world and authority was in emperors and rulers, who should be guided by the Truth of the Church.
6. Rivalries began to develop between jurisdictions – especially between Antioch and Alexandria – which would be the background for the Christologic debates reviewed in the next session
7. **Saint John Chrysostom** was born in Antioch in 349, to Secundus and Anthusa. Secundus was a high-ranking officer in the Syrian army who died shortly after John’s birth. Raised by his devout mother, John studied rhetoric in Antioch and then under Libanius, a famous orator and adherent to Roman paganism. (On his deathbed Libanius said, “He [John] would have been my successor if the Christians had not taken him from us.”)

8. In 367 John met Bishop Meletius of Antioch and was so impressed that he began devoting himself to Christian asceticism. In 370 he was baptized by Meletius, ordained a lector, and joined an ascetic group led by Diodorus, who would become Bishop of Tarsus.
9. From 374 until 376 John lived as an hermit in caves around Antioch, but returned to the city due to ill health. In 381 he was ordained a deacon by Meletius and began writing, becoming the most prolific writer in the Eastern Church. In 386 he was ordained a priest by Meletius' successor, Bishop Flavian.
10. From 386 until 398 John preached in Antioch, with or instead of Bishop Flavian, experiencing a period of great theological productivity. In 387, in response to levy of new taxes, the people of Antioch rebelled, destroying statues of Emperor Theodosius. John preached 20 homilies during that Lent on the error of the people's ways, winning the support of the Emperor.
11. In 395 Emperor Theodosius, on his deathbed, divided the Empire between sons Honorius (West) and Arcadius (East). Arcadius' wife was Empress Eudoxia.
12. In 398 Emperor Arcadius had John secretly taken out of Antioch (i.e. kidnapped) to Constantinople, where he was consecrated Bishop of Constantinople on 26 February, against John's wishes, by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria.
13. John's first acts included a reconciliation of Constantinople and Rome, and a 'cleaning of the Church from the top down'. He reduced episcopal expenses, eliminated frequent Patriarchial banquets that had become popular among the wealthy, forbade women housekeepers in the homes of priests and monks, removed two deacons, and confined wandering monks to their monasteries. He established hospitals for the poor and preached against wealthy extravagance and finery of dress, saying, "Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when He is naked. Do not pay Him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect Him outside where He is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me' ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well."
14. In 403 a homily on vain luxury of women was reported to Empress Eudoxia, who gathered Theophilus of Alexandria and 29 bishops at the Synod of Oak and banished John. But the outcry of the people and an earthquake on the eve of his imprisonment convinced Eudoxia to appeal to Arcadius for John's reinstatement. Two months later a silver statue of Eudoxia was placed in front of the cathedral, and boisterous celebrations interfered with services. John complained to the prefect of the city, saying, "Again Herodias raves; again she is troubled; she dances again; and again desires to receive John's [the Baptist] head in a charger." The prefect reported this to Eudoxia, who promptly summoned Theophilus and bishops to depose John again.
15. After two failed attempts to kill John, on Pascha in 404, as catechumens were being baptized, soldiers invaded the cathedral and took John. On 24 June Arcadius signed a decree of exile. Emperor Honorius (West) and Pope Innocent I tried to summon a synod in John's defense, but the legates were imprisoned. They then broke off communion with the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria. In the summer of 407, exiled further from the Caucasus to the extreme

edge of the Empire, John, sick and forced to march, died. His last words were. “Glory be to God for all things.”

16. John was quickly recognized as a saint after his death, and in 438, Emperor Theodosius II, Eudoxia’s son, translated John’s relics to Constantinople. Most of those relics were looted by the Crusaders in 1204. Some were returned to the Orthodox Church in 2004 by Pope John Paul II. His skull was taken to Russia in 1655, confiscated by the Soviets in 1920, placed in a museum in Moscow and ultimately given to the Russian Orthodox Church.
17. Saint John Chrysostom is commemorated on 27 January (translation of relics to Constantinople), 30 January (Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs – Saint John, Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian), 14 September (his repose), and 13 November (as Archbishop of Constantinople).
18. Saint John clearly acknowledged the Tradition of the Church and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He criticized Christians for taking part in pagan amusements, and Jewish Christians for taking part in Jewish services and feast days. He said, “It is not possible for one to be wealthy and just at the same time. Do you pay such honor to your excrements as to receive them into a silver chamber pot when another man made in the image of God is perishing in the cold?”
19. He harmonized the liturgical life of the Church by revising prayers and rubrics of the Divine Liturgy. He said, “Consider how [Jesus Christ] teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He commands each of the faithful who prays to do so universally, for the whole world. For He did not say ‘Thy will be done in me or in us’, but ‘on earth’, the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer differ from heaven.”
20. He avoided allegory and images, preaching and writing practically and prolifically. For example: 238 letters, 67 homilies on Genesis, 59 on Psalms, 90 on Matthew, 88 on John, 55 on Acts, and 34 on Galatians.