

NAMES OF KEY THEOLOGIANS IN THE HISTORY OF TRINITARIANISM

Abelard, Peter (1079-1142). Abelard was a brilliant teacher and popular philosopher during the scholastic period. He was just as popular for his affair with his student, Heloise. However, his teachings on the Trinity were in opposition to accepted church doctrine. He taught God was a finite power and the Holy Spirit was the soul of the world. Furthermore, he taught that Christ's death was simply a demonstration of God's love, an example for our moral encouragement, and we should respond with obedience.

Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328). Bishop of Alexandria when Arius* was a presbyter there. Alexander opposed Arius and called an Egyptian synod (c. 318) that condemned Arius' teaching and excommunicated him. Described by Rufinus as "gentle and quiet," Alexander attended Nicaea and affirmed the full deity of Christ and the Nicene Creed.

Ambrose of Milan (c. 338-397). While provincial governor of northern Italy, he was baptized and hurried through lower church offices to become Bishop of Milan (all in a week) after the death of Auxentius, an "Arian" bishop, in AD 374. He turned over his pastoral duties to study Scripture and theology. He defended the Trinity against anti-Nicenes in Milan and declared, "We confess Father and Son and Holy Spirit with the result that the fullness of divinity and unity of power exist in perfect Trinity."

Anselm of Bec and Canterbury (1033-1109). Anselm was an influential scholastic. Roscelin, a teacher of theology and philosophy, was teaching that the Trinity was either three distinct beings or that the Father and the Holy Spirit became incarnate with the Son. Roscelin also reported that Lanfranc (Anselm's predecessor) and Anselm were teaching the same. Anselm responded to defend the Trinity. He is also the author of the "ontological argument" for the existence of God.

Apollinarius of Laodicea (c. 310-392). A bishop faithful to the Nicene Creed, he was a biblical exegete and writer against contemporary heretics, including Eunomius (Arianism) and Marcellus of Ancyra* (Godhead began as one; expanded to three; and will return again to one). Apollinarius claimed the Jesus had no human soul. Chalcedon in 451 declared (contrary to Apollinarius) Christ is one person in two natures – fully God and fully man.

Aquinas, Thomas (1225-1274). Aquinas wanted to move Christian theology from using Neo-Platonic philosophy, popular in the church since Augustine,* towards the philosophy of Aristotle. He begins his examination of the Godhead with the essence of God and then moves towards the three persons of the Trinity. Aquinas took Aristotle's cosmological argument for God, the unmoved mover, to prove there must be a "Prime Mover."

Arius (c. 260-336). Arius was probably a student of Lucian and then presbyter of Baucalis, a part of Alexandria, under Alexander.* Arius taught that the Son was created and that there was a time when He was not. The Son did not share the Father's divine substance. Arius received support from Eusebius of Nicomedia (also a student of Lucian) and Eusebius of Caesarea.* Arius' views were condemned at the Council of

Nicaea in 325. Nonetheless, Arianism continued to divide the church until Council of Constantinople in 381.

Athanasius (c.295-373). Athanasius became the Bishop of Alexandria in 328, in the midst of the Arian controversy. He was a protégé of Alexander* and may have accompanied him to Nicaea in 325. He would be exiled and restored on several occasions for his stance against Arianism as bishops and emperors went back and forth on the issue. He staunchly defended Nicaea and the Trinity.

Athenagoras (2nd Century). Little is known about this early Christian apologist. It is reported by Methodius (3rd century Bishop of Tyre) that Athenagoras presented a defense of Christianity, notably a defense of the Trinity against the charge of atheism, to emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine has perhaps the greatest influence in Western Christianity. His major work on the Trinity both summarized the patristic writings on the Godhead and elaborated on the doctrine of the Trinity. Still keeping within the Niceno-Constantinoplan Creed, he reversed the Cappadocian concept of the Trinity placing essence of God over the three persons of the Trinity. He taught that humanity, created in God's image, should reflect some Trinitarian thought. He suggested analogies such as mind, knowledge, and love all bound in one person.

Barth, Karl (1886-1968). Barth was perhaps the most influential Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. His description of the Trinity begins to border on neo-modalism – “we must say that all God's work, as we are to grasp it on the basis of His revelation, is one act which occurs simultaneously and in concert in all His three modes of being.”

Basil “the Great” of Caesarea (330-379). Basil is the first of the Cappadocian Fathers who developed fresh, creative, Trinitarian thinking. He defended the Nicæan faith against Eunomios and his former teacher Eustathios of Sebaste (both Arians). Basil sought to convince Eastern bishops that the *homoousios* of the West was basically equal to the *homoiousios* of the East—the divine “substance” of God is the common nature in the three persons of the Godhead. He also defended the Holy Spirit as distinct from other spirits and a distinct person of the Godhead.

Baur, Ferdinand Christian (1792-1860). A historical critic, Baur proposed a conflict between Jewish Christians (followers of Peter) and Hellenistic Christians (followers of Paul). The early Catholic Church was a synthesis of the two. Thus, he dated most of the New Testament in the 2nd century. He denied anything supernatural or miraculous – Christianity lay in the ethical teachings of Jesus and his doctrine of the kingdom of God.

Boethius (480-524). Boethius was a scholastic before his time (much referred to by Aquinas). In two major works, his powerful Aristotelian logic was applied to the doctrine of the Trinity with his definition of “person” shaping most of Western thought: *rationalis naturae individual substantia* (rational nature of an individual substance).

Bornkamm, Gunther (1905-1990). Bornkamm was a German New Testament scholar and proponent of the Second (New) Quest for the historical Jesus, focusing on the sayings of Jesus. He was a student of Rudolf Bultmann* and a pioneer of redaction criticism. Highly skeptical of the historical accuracy of the New Testament, he ascribed to the view that Jesus the man was later made into Christ by the church.

- Bultmann, Rudolph** (1884-1976). German exegete associated with the “No Quest” period (c. 1906-1953) who agreed with Wrede that “we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus.” He argued that the Gospels are simply a collection of literary units strung together like beads on a string.
- Calvin, John** (1509-1564). As one of the greatest of Reformers, Calvin rooted all his doctrine in Scripture as, most famously, in the *Institutes* which begin with the nature of God and move to the three persons. Slightly different from Luther, he also allowed and affirmed the words of the patristic fathers to help identify false teachers. Thus, he accepted the Trinitarian affirmations in the ecumenical councils up to Augustine.
- Catherine of Siena** (1347-1380). Catherine took a vow of chastity as a young girl and practiced an ascetic life. She promoted an orthodox mysticism of a warm relationship with the Godhead. In light of the incarnation, she concludes the human creature is an eternal object of Trinitarian love—this is the meaning of “God is Love.”
- Cyril of Alexandria** (c. 378-444). Cyril succeeded his uncle, Theophilus, as patriarch of Alexandria in 412. He had a leading role at the Council of Ephesus (431) which condemned Nestorius* (two natures and two persons in Christ). Regarding the Incarnation, he repeatedly emphasized that the distinctiveness and completeness of the divine and human realities remained fully intact and alive after the union.
- Eusebius of Caesarea** (c. 260-339). Eusebius was a Bishop of Caesarea and an early supporter of Arius.* He subscribed to Nicaea with some reservations. Although he taught a preexistent Trinity of three persons, he also taught that the Son is begotten by the Father, subordinate to Him and not eternal. He also taught the Holy Spirit is the first and most exalted creature of the Son. The Son incarnate had human flesh, but not a human soul (Apollinarianism).
- Funk, Robert** (1926-2005). Funk was the founder of the Jesus Seminar in 1985. The seminar concludes that Jesus did not claim to be God or Messiah; Jesus did not believe his death was necessary for salvation; and that the kingdom of God had already arrived in the first century and was visible in the way his followers treated each other. The Jesus Seminar is a continuation of the Second Quest.
- Gregory of Nazianzus** (330-390). One of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory was the first to present a “social model” of the Trinity. He introduced *perichoresis* to depict the union of the two natures of Christ. He refuted Apollinarians (denying Jesus had a human soul) by stating, “What is not assumed is not healed [saved].” He emphasized deification—Christ became human so we could become divine. He also insisted that the image of God in man was badly distorted, but not destroyed because of sin.
- Gregory of Nyssa** (c. 335-395). Gregory was an exceptional orator and the youngest of the Cappadocian Fathers. His central contribution to Trinitarian doctrine is the formula, “one nature [*ousia*] in three persons [*hypostaseis*]” affirmed by the Council of Constantinople in 381. He defended the deity of Christ by stating that the “generation” of the Son from the Father by no means diminished Christ’s divinity. Likewise, the procession of the Spirit from the Father (through the Son) does not diminish the Spirit.
- Gregory of Palamas** (c. 1296-1359). He distinguished between the divine essence (substance) and the divine “energies.” The essence of God includes those attributes that only God retracts, such as immutability and transcendence above creation. God’s *energies*, on the other hand, are divine qualities that may permeate finite existence.

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300-367). He sought to bring the East and West together around *homoiousios* (used in the East for the same substance, though it literally means “similar”) and *homoousios* (term used in the West). The East was suspicious that the West was vulnerable to modalism. He argued that the Son is distinct from the Father, but of the same divine substance and attributes.

Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 117). Ignatius argued against Docetism (heresy that denied Jesus’ humanity). A central theme of his theology was the deity and humanity of Christ.

Irenaeus (c. 115-c. 202). Disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, the powerful Irenaeus wrote against gnosticism. Bishop of Lyon, a major point of his theology was the unity of the Godhead (against the Gnostic Aeons or divisions of God). He also referred to the Son and Holy Spirit as the “hands of God.”

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165). The apologist Justin defended the deity of Christ using Old Testament prophecies. He presented Christ the Word (*Logos*) as the pre-existent thought of God. The *Logos* imagery was familiar to the pagan philosophers of the time.

Lombard, Peter (c. 1100-1160). Lombard’s four volume *Sentences* laid theological foundations for scholasticism emphasizing essence over persons, making God more abstract. Other theologians of the time (Joachim of Fiore and Richard of St. Victor*) accused him and mainstream Western theology of elevating the essence of God over the persons of the Trinity such that he implied a “Quaternity.”

Lossky, Vladimir (1903-1958). Lossky is a leading 20th-century articulator of Eastern Orthodoxy, notably in his *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944/1957) which includes argument against the *filioque*. Persuasive of the Eastern approach to the Trinity, he wrote, “Human thought does not run the risk of going astray if it passes from the consideration of the three persons to that of the common nature.”

Luther, Martin (1483-1546). Luther was the greatest Reformation theologian, assuming but rarely defending the Trinity. His Christology affirmed two distinct natures inseparable in the one person: if Christ in his divinity is omnipresent, the same is true of his human nature. Lutheran “transubstantiation,” then, affirms Christ’s spiritual and bodily presence in the Eucharist.

Marcellus of Ancyra (c. 280-374). Bishop of Ancyra in Galatia Marcellus ardently opposed Arianism and attended the Council of Nicaea in 325. However, he taught God was only one person before creation. At creation, the Logos went forth into the world. At the Incarnation, the Logos became the Son of God. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit emerged from the Father and the Son as a third person. Moreover, at the consummation of all things, both the Son and the Spirit will be reabsorbed back into God.

Marcion (d. c. 154). Marcion fell under the Gnostic teaching of Credo. He went on to create his own church. He separated the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament (Gnostic). Furthermore, he separated Christianity from its Jewish roots. He was a docetist, keeping the divine Christ separate from matter.

Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Maximus argued against a form of Monothelitism (denial of Christ’s human nature) to resolve the Monophysite controversy. The issue was whether Christ had one will (only divine) or two wills (divine and human). The

Creed of Constantinople in 680 condemned Monothelitism and affirmed that Christ had two, perfect wills—one divine and one human.

- Moltmann, Jürgen** (b. 1926-). Although other modern theologians had begun to reappraise the social model of the Trinity, it was Moltmann who argued powerfully for the three divine persons in relationship in *The Crucified God* (1973/74), *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1980/81), and numerous subsequent works. Regarding perichoresis and divine relationality, his thought is primary in the renaissance of Trinitarian studies.
- Montanus** (late 2nd c.) The extreme charismatic ascetic Montanus brought attention to the role of the Holy Spirit. He demanded strict forms of giving, celibacy, and separation from worldly Christians together with normative prophesy, tongues, and sometimes bizarre behavior; he allegedly affirmed he was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.
- Nestorius** (c. 381-451). For a while Bishop of Constantinople, the disciplinary Nestorius argued against the term *Theotokos* (Mother of God), as the term confounded the distinctions of Christ's natures. He advocated the term *Christotokos*, or Mother of Christ. Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, accused him of claiming not only two natures (divine and human) but two persons sharing one body. Nestorianism was condemned at Ephesus in 431, but Nestorianism continues to today in the Eastern church.
- Novatian** (3rd c.). He defended monotheism and the Son as true God. He only briefly discussed the Holy Spirit and does not specifically call the Holy Spirit "God" or a "person." He wrote against Marcion* (Gnostic). Briefly counter-bishop of Rome, Novatian was very strict in dealing with those who denied their faith under the persecution, refusing to allow them readmission to communion (hence Novatianism).
- Origen** (c. 185-253). Origen was the prolific teacher of a platonized Christian faith in Alexandria, with emphasis on allegorical, moral and spiritual meanings of the Bible (especially the OT). His great contribution to Christology is the phrase "eternal generation" of the Son.
- Photius** (c. 820-c. 891). Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius argued against *filioque*—fearing it diminished the person of the Holy Spirit—hence temporarily dividing the empire.
- Rahner, Karl** (1904-1984). The most influential Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century, Rahner influenced Vatican II and nearly all Trinitarian thought since the 1960s. While yet Western in his orientation, Rahner appreciated Eastern Orthodox insights regarding the Godhead. The much debated "Rahner's Rule" declares that "The Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa."
- Richard of St. Victor** (d. 1173). The Scotsman Richard was prior of the Abby of St. Victor (Paris). He employed logic to argue that if God is supremely good and love, then there is necessary self-giving relationship in the Trinity: the love of the Father cannot remain alone and must flow to a person of equal dignity, the Son. The Father and Son, then, have a third person, the Holy Spirit, as the object of their love.
- Tertullian** (c. 155-c.220). In his work *Against Praxeas*, the lawyer Tertullian articulates the the Christian Trinity against Modalism and Patripassianism (the belief that the Father suffered on the cross (i.e., no eternal personal distinction between Father and Son). He seems to be the first to employ the terms, *trinitas* and *personae* in the formula "one substance, three persons."