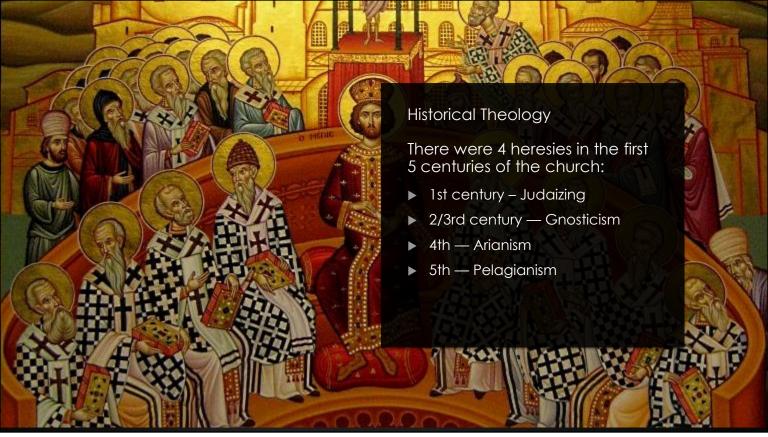
# Outline The First 5 Centuries: The Apostolic Fathers. From Persecution to Empire's official religion. Heresies help clarify Christian beliefs.

# **RECAP**

- We're looking at **persecution** in the early Church.
- Peter/Paul were killed under Nero.
- Started with waves of persecution, but more local.
- Became more formal towards end.
- Culminating with the Great Persecution under **Diocletion** in 303.
- Then **Emperor Constantine** becomes a Christian.
- Christianity becomes legal.
- Christianity becomes **official Religion** of the Empire.



# **Historical Theology**

- When studying church history, it's good to follow the theological developments.
- One way this can be done is to look at the **heresies** the church faced in the early centuries.
- These heresies led to councils where the fathers clarified and ratified doctrines.

# 4 heresies in the first 5 centuries of the church:

- 1st century Judaizing
- 2/3rd century Gnosticism
- 4th Arianism
- 5th Pelagianism

Here's a brief summary of each.



# Judaizing or the Judaizers - 1st century AD

- We see this in the New Testament.
- People who said Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised.
- Must keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved.
   Acts 15:1—And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
- PROBLEMS:
  - Legalism: said salvation was based on works.
  - Denied Christ's completed sacrifice.
- Was addressed in Acts 15 and book of Galatians.

# **Think About**

- Paul said to Peter in Galatians 2:16, "...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." How does this verse relate to the issue of Judaizing, and what does it teach us about salvation?
- Why do you think some Christians struggle to accept that they are saved by faith and not by their works?



# Gnosticism - 2nd/3rd century

- We see it beginning to be talked about in the New Testament.
- Not a single movement but lots off versions and leaders.

# **GENERAL OVERSIMPLIFICATION:**

- Taught a hierarchy of divine beings or "Aeons."
- At the top of the hierarchy was the **Unknowable Father** (without attributes, perfect).
- Out of this One proceeded a series of emanations or Aeons (pleroma).
- Each Aeon was less perfect than the previous one (either because of further remoteness from the One or some imperfectness).
- Through some accident, the lowest Aeon produced the world of evil matter (Sophia).
- Man's problem is that we've forgotten we have the "spark of divinity."
- Taught we must realize we are divine through secret knowledge (gnosis).
- Taught can even see this secret knowledge in the bible if you know how to look for it.
- Said Jesus was not physical being but phantasm (docetism).
- Jesus did not suffer, nor did he die.
- After resurrection he gave most mature followers this "secret knowledge."

# Here's the problem...

# **Gnosticism Problems**

- It denied Jesus was human (just a spirit).
- ▶ Jesus **never resurrected** (never had a physical body).
- Secret knowledge required for salvation.
- ▶ Many divine beings (polytheistic-like).
- Some groups taught humans were divine.

# Discussion

- How does this compare to Hinduism, Self-Realization Fellowship or the New Age Movement?
- Advanced: Where does the Bible seem to speak against Gnosticism?



# **Gnosticism Problems:**

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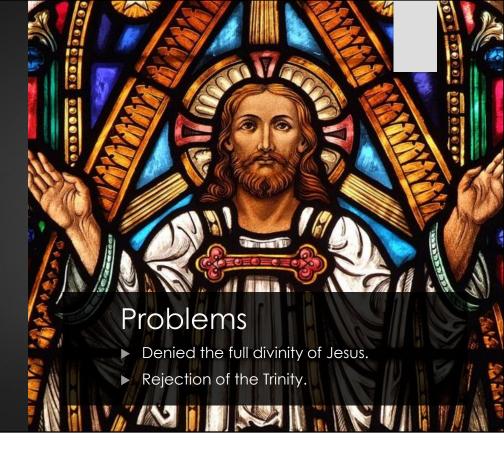
# **DISCUSSION:**

- How does this compare to Hinduism, Self-Realization Fellowship or the New Age Movement?
- Advanced: Where does the Bible seem to speak against Gnosticism?

# Some New Testament verses that seem to speak against Gnosticism:

- Col. 2:8-9: "...in Christ all the fullness (pleroma) of the Deity lives in bodily form."
- 1 John 4:1-3: "... Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has **come in the flesh** is from God..."
- 1 Timothy 6:20-21: "...Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is **falsely called knowledge** (*gnosis*)..."





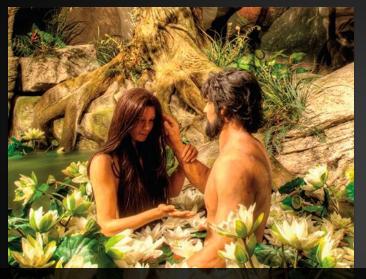
# Arianism & Nature of Christ – 4th century

- Arianism was named after **Arius, a priest in Alexandria** in the early 4th century.
- He taught Jesus was not co-eternal and co-equal with God the Father, but rather a created being who was subordinate to God.
- It was a heresy that **denied the full divinity** of Jesus Christ.
- Like Jehovah's Witnesses today.

# **PROBLEMS:**

- Denied the **full divinity** of Jesus.
- Rejection of the Trinity.

This led to the first ecumenical church council since Acts 15...



# **Problems**

- Denied original sin (that all humans have a sin nature).
- ► Human self-sufficiency.

# 4. Pelagianism& HumanEffort

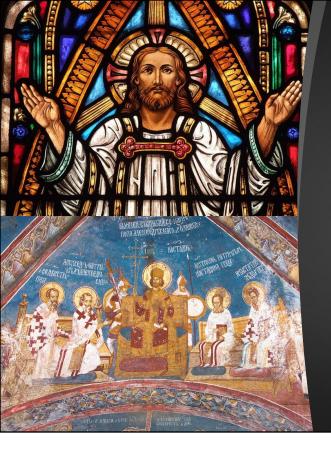
5TH CENTURY

# Pelagianism – 5th century

- Named after Pelagius, a British monk.
- He was known for his teachings on free will and human nature.
- Said people have **complete free will** and are can **live a sinless life** without divine grace.
- Humans are **born morally neutral**, with the **ability to choose good or evil**, and that it is through their own choices and actions that they **become either righteous or sinful**.
- Pelagius denied original sin and believed that each soul is created as good.
- God directly creates each soul in womb.
- According to Pelagius, each person is born in a pure state and can choose good or evil.
- Pelagius believed that humans have no inclination to sin and are perfectly free.
- Augustine of Hippo was a leading critic of Pelagianism.

## **PROBLEMS:**

- Denial of **original sin** (that all humans have a sin nature).
- Human self-sufficiency.



# Start of the Church Councils

- ► Council of Nicea (AD 325)
- ▶ Produced the Nicene Creed:

We believe in **one God**, **the Father**, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father...

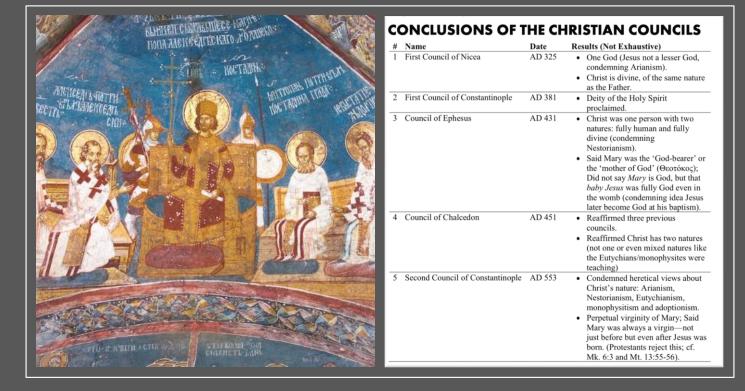
# **Start of the Ecumenical Church Councils**

- About the time of the third heresy (Arianism), we start seeing **church councils**, where the leaders could **meet publicly** and **discuss topics** like the **nature of Christ**.
- Up to that time, persecutions prevented such gatherings. But when Christianity was made legal, persecutions ended, so the leaders could safely meet.
- Constantine was also coming into power. This division over Christ's nature threatened to divide his kingdom so he called Council of Nicea (AD 325).

# Council of Nicea (AD 325)

- Conclusion at Nicea was Jesus Christ is equal, same substance as the Father.
- They produced the Nicene Creed (AD 326)
  - "We believe in **one God, the Father**, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in **one Lord, Jesus Christ**, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, **God from God**, Light from Light, true God from true God, **begotten**, **not made**, of **one Being with the Father**..."
- It was a direct response to Arianism, clarifying that the Son of God was not created and is co-equal to the Father.

They continued to have other councils, where they continued to clarify Christ's nature, and ultimately the Trinity...



# 1. First Council of Nicea (AD 325)

- Jesus was/is **not a lesser God** (condemning Arianism).
- Christ is **fully divine**, of the same nature as the Father.

# 2. First Council of Constantinople (AD 381)

Acknowledged the deity of the Holy Spirit, further refining concept of the Trinity.

# 3. First Council of Ephesus (AD 431)

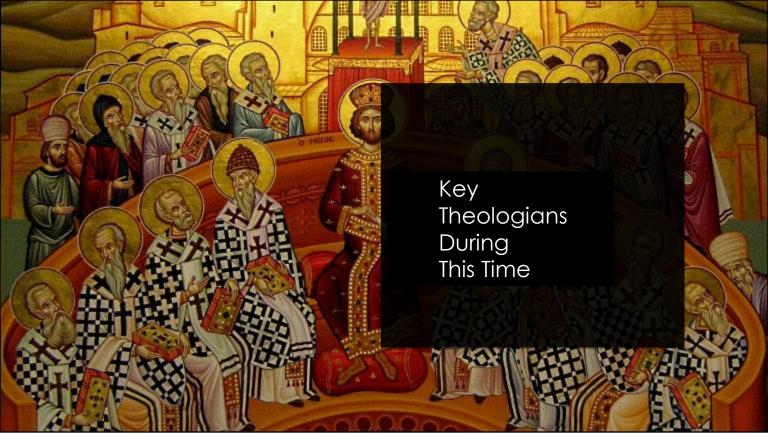
- Christ was one person with two natures: fully human and fully divine.
- Said Mary was the 'God-bearer' or the 'mother of God' (theotokos); Did not say Mary is God, but that baby Jesus was fully God even in the womb (condemning idea Jesus later become God at his baptism).

# 4. The Council of Chalcedon (451)

Clarified that Christ had two distinct natures. Produced the Chalcedonian Creed which can
be summarized by saying Jesus has two natures: full divinity and full humanity and these
are united in one person forever (called the hypostatic union).

# 5. Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553)

 Condemned heretical views about Christ's nature: Arianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, monophysitism and adoptionism.



# Key theologians during this time

There are at least 3 ways to survey the first 5 centuries:

- By heresies.
- By councils.
- By theologians.

Now, we'll look at key theologians.

We will see who were some of the disciples who came after the Apostolic Fathers. These were the leaders who were the early **apologists** and **theologians** in the early church.

Remember, we are jumping back in time now to the 1st century...



c. 100 - 165

# **Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)**

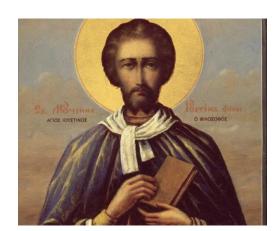
- Justin was an early **Christian apologist** and **philosopher**.
- · His primary concerns were to promote the Christian faith in the face of opposition and persecution, and to demonstrate the compatibility of Christianity with Greek philosophy.
- He wrote the **First Apology** to defend Christianity to Emperor Antoninus Pius. (APOLOGETICS!)
- Justin had a high view of Greek philosophy and believed it prepared the way for Christ.
- But he rejected Greek philosophy that were incompatible with Christianity.
- Under the authority of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he and his students were seized, tried, flogged and beheaded in Rome.
- That's why he's called Justin MARTYR

It's interesting to look at writing samples from these theologians...

# Sample of Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr, The First Apology, where Justin writes the Emperor and defends Christianity:

"To the Emperor Titus Ælius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Cæsar... Hence are we called atheists [because they would not participate in traditional Roman religious practices]. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God... What sober-minded man, then, will not acknowledge that we are not atheists, worshipping as we do the Maker of this universe, and declaring, as we have been taught, that He has no need of streams of blood and libations and incense..."

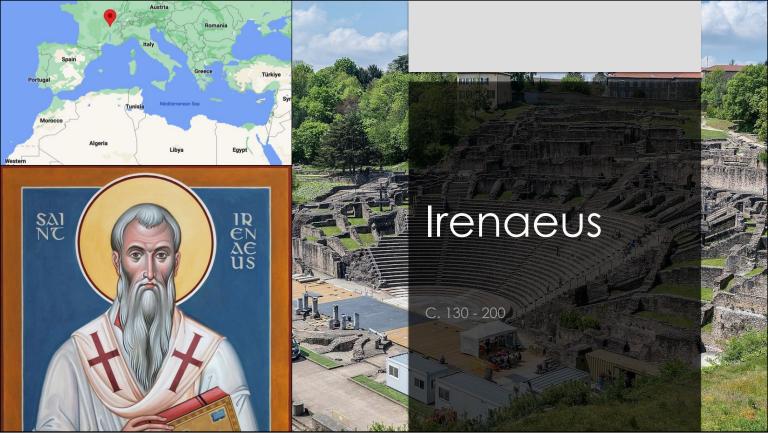


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# Irenaeus (c. 130-200)

- Irenaeus was a **bishop of Lugdunum** (modern-day Lyon, France) (PIC)
- Was a **disciple of Polycarp** (who knew John).
- He argued against Gnosticism using the Bible and tradition.
- Irenaeus emphasized there was no secret teaching in Christianity.

# How he argued against Gnosticism:

- Bible teaches there is only one God, not a Pleroma of Gods.
- The Bible says that the material world is good (Genesis).
- All people are created in the image of God (which went against elitism of Gnostics).
- There was no secret teaching.
- The Gospel was transmitted not just orally but in **written form**.
- If Paul taught secret knowledge it **would have been recorded** by Luke in Acts.
- Christians can appeal to the Scriptures and tradition (Rule of Faith) handed down.
- Unanimity of bishops stands in contrast to the everchanging beliefs of the Gnostics.
- Irenaeus could trace the line of tradition back through the bishops to the apostles.

# Sample of Irenaeus

Irenaeus, Against Heresies (Book I, Chapter 8); speaking against the Valentinians, a gnostic sect:

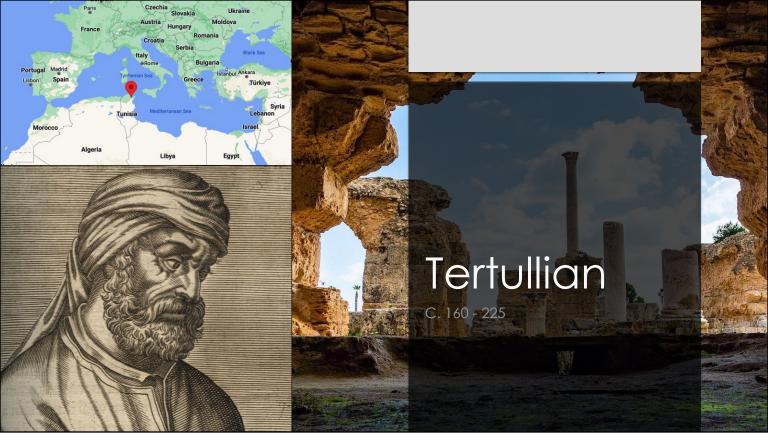
"Such, then, is their system [the Valentinians], which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge [gnosis]. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures ... these persons patch together old wives' fables, and then endeavour, by violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found, to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions. We have already stated how far they proceed in this way with respect to the interior of the Pleroma [their false hierarchy of divine beings]."



# Sample of Irenaeus

Against Heresies (Book I, Chapter 8), source, speaking against the Valentinians, a gnostic sect:

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# Tertullian (c. 160-225)

- Tertullian was born in Carthage, North Africa, around 160-165 AD. (PIC)
- He is credited as the first to use the term "Trinity"
- Tertullian **strongly opposed Greek philosophy** but used some philosophical concepts in his writings.
- He appealed to tradition, reason, and scripture to defend Christian beliefs against heresies (APOLOGETICS).
- Tertullian had a significant influence on the early church and is known as the father of Latin Christianity and the founder of Western theology (Rome-centered/Latin v. Constantinople/Greek)

# Sample of Tertullian

Prescription Against Heretics, Chapter 7, speaking against pagan philosophy:

"These [pagan philosophies] are "the doctrines" of men and "of demons" produced for itching ears of the spirit of this world's wisdom: this the Lord called "foolishness... Writing to the Colossians, he [Paul] says, "See that no one beguile you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and contrary to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost." ... What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? ... Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief..."



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# **Athanasius**

C. 296 - C. 373

# Athanasius (c. 296 – c. 373)

- Athanasius was bishop of the city of Alexandria, Egypt.
- He's best known for his defense of **orthodox Trinitarian doctrine** against Arianism, which denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ.
- He played a key role in shaping the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that there is **one God** in **three persons**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- His teaching summed up in **Athanasian Creed**, a statement of Christian belief that affirms the Trinity and the Incarnation.
- Athanasius is also known for his role in **canonizing the New Testament**, helping to establish the list of **27 books** that are recognized as authoritative by most Christian traditions.

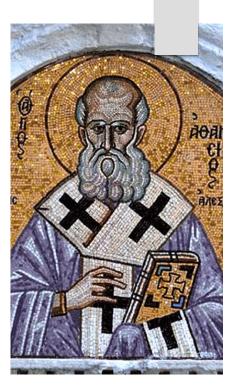
# Sample of Athanasius

Letters 'To the Bishops of Africa"

"For it is made clear both among you and among all, and no Christian can have a doubtful mind on the point, that our faith is not in the Creature, but in one God, Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible: and in one Lord Jesus Christ His Onlybegotten Son, and in one Holy Ghost; one God, known in the holy and perfect Trinity..."

Athanasian Creed (summary of his teachings)

"...we worship **one God in Trinity**, and **Trinity in Unity**; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the **Glory equal**, the **Majesty coeternal**..."



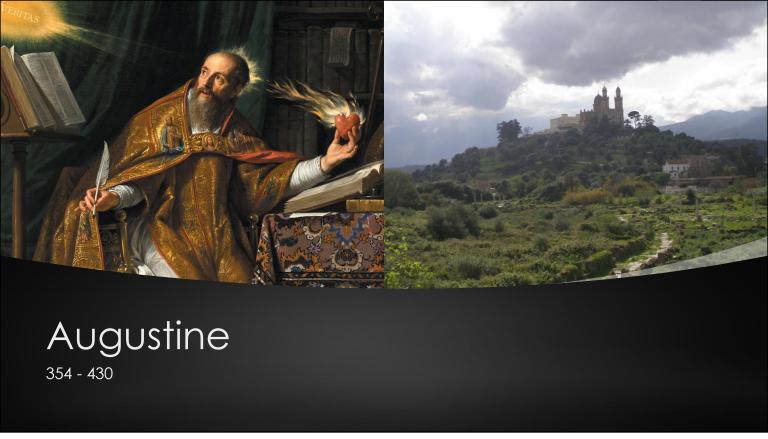
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# Augustine (354 – 430)

- Hippo Regius (now Annaba, Algeria) -- PIC
- Wrote **against Pelagius** who said each person was born in same state as Adam (born good) and could achieve salvation without divine intervention.
- Clarified extent of the Fall:
  - Original Sin: Augustine taught that all humans inherit the sin of Adam and Eve's
    disobedience to God, resulting in a state of spiritual corruption and inability to
    save themselves without divine grace.
  - <u>Predestination</u>: Taught the need for divine grace and God chooses who will receive grace.
- His books are still widely read today:
  - Confessions: an autobiographical account of Augustine's journey to faith and conversion to Christianity.
  - City of God: a defense of Christianity against pagan accusations that it caused Rome's decline and fall.
- Arguably one of the most important theologians in Christian history
  - Has had significant impact on both Roman Catholics and Protestants today.

# Sample of Augustine

Augustine, Confessions, Book 1; speaking about being a baby...

"...[I] wished to tell my wishes to those who might satisfy them, but I could not; for my wants were within me, while they were without, and could not by any faculty of theirs enter into my soul. So I cast about limbs and voice, making the few and feeble signs I could, like, though indeed not much like, unto what I wished; and when I was not satisfied — either not being understood, or because it would have been injurious to me — I grew indignant that my elders were not subject unto me, and that those on whom I had no claim did not wait on me, and avenged myself on them by tears.

...

Who brings to my remembrance the sin of my infancy? For before You none is free from sin, not even the infant which has lived but a day upon the earth.

...

I myself have seen and **known an infant to be jealous** though it could not speak. It became pale, and **cast bitter looks** on its foster-brother. Who is ignorant of this?"



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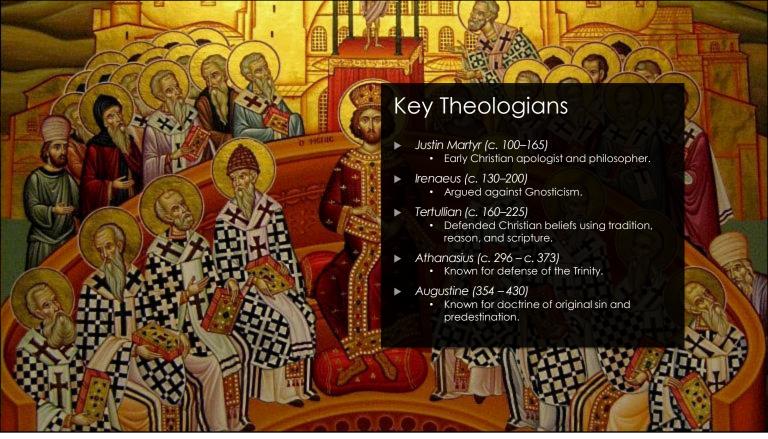
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# **Key Theologians Recap**

We looked at the **key theologians** during the first 5 centuries.

- Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)
  - Early Christian apologist and philosopher.
- Irenaeus (c. 130–200)
  - Argued against Gnosticism.
- Tertullian (c. 160–225)
  - Defended Christian beliefs using tradition, reason, and scripture.
- Athanasius (c. 296 c. 373)
  - Known for defense of the Trinity.
- Augustine (354 430)
  - Known for doctrine of original sin and predestination.

# Next, we'll jump to the Reformation...

# Think About or Discuss

- ▶ Justin Martyr had a high view of Greek philosophy, but he also rejected certain aspects that were incompatible with Christianity. How can we navigate cultural and philosophical ideas today that may not align with our faith, while still being respectful and thoughtful? (Colossians 2:8)
- Many of these early Christian theologians, such as Athanasius and Augustine, emphasized the importance of sound doctrine and theology. Why do you think it's important for Christians to have a solid understanding of theology today, and how can good theology help us grow in our faith and relationship with God? (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
- ▶ Tertullian believed that Christian beliefs could be defended using reason, tradition, and scripture. How can we use these methods to defend the faith against false teachings today? (1 Peter 3:15)

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# Overview of Church History

NEXT

**EVENTS OF THE REFORMATION** UPCOMING
UPC

# **Overview of Church History**

Early CHURCH Fathers TO CONSTANTINE DONE

NEXT **Events of the Reformation** 

**UPCOMING** Shared Beliefs between Roman Catholics and Protestants

UPCOMING Overview of Key Differences

UPCOMING Origin of Denominations Since the Reformation