



The Andrew Fuller Center

for Baptist Studies

DIRECTOR

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MANDATE

The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, now located at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, seeks to promote the study of Baptist history and doctrine as well as reflection on the contemporary significance of that history. The Center is named in honor of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British Baptist pastor/theologian who opposed aberrant doctrine among Baptists in England and was instrumental in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society. Fuller was a close friend and theological mentor of William Carey, founder of the modern international missions movement.

The Andrew Fuller Center will hold an annual major conference that will examine various aspects of Baptist history and thought. It will also support the publication of a critical edition of the works of Andrew Fuller, and from time to time, other works in Baptist history. In time, it is hoped the Center will have a role in mentoring junior scholars involved in Baptist studies. Twice each year, the Andrew Fuller Center will also publish *Eusebeia*, a journal primarily, though not exclusively, related to Baptist history and thought.

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[FROM THE *EDITOR*]

WHY STUDY THE FATHERS?



Our generation is afflicted with a kind of historical amnesia, which, unfortunately, has not left the church untouched. For instance, Malcolm Muggeridge, who became a professing Christian after a lifetime of skepticism, in remarks made in the account of his conversion, stated that in the final analysis “history is phony.” As he went on to say:

...in the case of the greatest happenings such as Christ’s life and death, historicity is completely without importance. It is very important to know the history of Socrates because Socrates is dead, but the history of Christ doesn’t matter because he is alive.¹

In such an intellectual ambience—which is non-sensical to anyone who values the historicity of Christian origins—the question, “Why study the Fathers?” must be asked again and answered afresh. Our forebears at the time of the Reformation well knew the benefit of studying the Patristic era.² What did they know that we have forgotten?

First, study of the Fathers, like any historical study,

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liberates us from the present.³ Every age has a certain outlook, presuppositions which remain unquestioned even by opponents. The examination of another period of thought forces us to confront our innate prejudices which would go unnoticed otherwise. For instance, Gustaf Aulén, in his classic study of the atonement, *Christus Victor*, argues that an objective study of the Patristic concept of atonement will reveal a motif which has received little attention in post-Reformation Christianity: the idea of the atonement as a divine conflict and victory, in which Christ fights and overcomes the evil powers of this world, under whom man has been held in bondage. According to Aulén, what is commonly accepted as the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement, the forensic theory of satisfaction, may in fact be a concept quite foreign to the New Testament. As to whether he is right or not—and I think he is quite wrong—can only come by a fresh examination of the sources, both New Testament and Patristic.

Then, the Fathers can provide us with a map for the Christian life. It is indeed exhilarating to stand on the east coast and watch the Atlantic surf and hear the pound of the waves. But this experience will be of little benefit in sailing to England. For this a map is needed. A map based upon the accumulated experience of thousands of voyagers. Similarly, we need such a map for the Christian life. Experiences are fine and good, but they will not serve as a suitable foundation for our lives in Christ. To be sure, we have the divine Scriptures, an ultimately sufficient foundation for all of our needs (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But the thought of the Fathers can help us enormously in building on this foundation. A fine example is provided by Athanasius' doctrine of the Spirit in his letters to Serapion, bishop of Thmuis. The present day has seen a resurgence of interest in the Person of the Holy Spirit. This is admirable, but also fraught with danger if the Spirit is conceived of apart from Christ. Yet, Athanasius' key insight was that "from our knowledge of the Son we may be able to have true knowledge of the Spirit."⁴ The Spirit cannot be divorced from the Son: not only does the Son send and give the Spirit, but the Spirit is the principle of the Christ-life within us. Many have fallen into fanatical enthusiasm because they failed to realize this basic truth: the Spirit cannot be separated from the Son.

Third, the Fathers may also, in some cases, help us to understand the New Testament. We have had too disparaging a view of Patristic exegesis, and have come close to considering the exposition of the Fathers as a consistent failure to understand the New Testament. For instance Cyril of Jerusalem in his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:5, which concerns temporary abstinence of sexual relations between married couples for the sake of prayer, assumes without question that the prayer is liturgical and communal.⁵ Cyril may be guilty of an anachronism, for he was a leader in "the hallowing of the time," that is, the observance of holy sea-

sons. Nonetheless, there is good evidence that such communal observances, in some form or other, are quite early. The liturgical life of the Church of Jerusalem in the fourth century was not that of Corinth in the first, but nevertheless there were links. Possibly it is the Protestant commentators who are guilty of anachronism when they assume that Paul meant private prayer; such religious individualism is more conceivable in the Protestant West than in first-century Corinth.

Again, in recent discussions of the Pauline doctrine of salvation, it has been asserted by the proponents of the so-called “New Perspective” that the classical Reformed view of justification has little foundation in Paul or the rest of the New Testament, but is more a product of the thinking of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564). Yet, in a second-century document apologetic work, the anonymous *Letter to Diognetus*, we find the following argument that sounds like it has been lifted straight from the pages of Luther.

The author has been arguing that God revealed his plan of salvation to none but his “beloved Son” until human beings realized their utter and complete inability to gain heaven by their own strength. Then, when men were conscious of their sin and impending judgement, God,

did not hate or reject us or bear us ill-will. Rather, he was long-suffering, bore with us, and in mercy he took our sins upon himself. He himself gave his own Son as a ransom for us [*lytron hyper hemon*]*—the Holy One for the godless, the Innocent One for the wicked, the Righteous One for the unrighteous [ton dikaiōn hyper ton adikōn], the Incorruptible for the corruptible, the Immortal for the mortal. For what else was able to cover our sins except his righteousness? In whom could we, who were lawless and godless, have been justified, but in the Son of God alone [en mono to huio tou theou]? O the sweet exchange! O the inscrutable work of God! O blessings beyond all expectation!—that the wickedness of many should be hidden in the one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of the One should justify the many wicked!*⁶

The use of the term *lytron* at the head of this passage recalls Mark 10:45 [“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (*lytron anti pollon*)”], where *lytron* bears all of the force of its meaning as a ransom payment that is substitutionary in character.⁷ Here, in the *Letter to Diognetus* this substitutionary motif is also in view in *lytron* as the subsequent clauses of this text display. And although our author employs *hyper* after *lytron* rather than the Markan *anti*, *hyper* is being used as a synonym of *anti*, as it frequently is in *koine* Greek.⁸ Then follow five dialectical ways of expressing this act

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of substitution, one of which—"the Righteous One for the unrighteous"—almost exactly reproduces a phrase from 1 Peter 3:18. What is highlighted in this dialectic are the twin soteriological themes of the Son's utter sinlessness and humanity's radical depravity, and that in ways in full accord with the classical Reformed view of the meaning of Christ's death for our salvation. As T.F. Torrance has generally observed:

[There is a] fundamental coherence between the faith of the New Testament and that of the early Church... The failure to discern this coherence in some quarters evidently has its roots in the strange gulf, imposed by analytical methods, between the faith of the primitive Church and the historical Jesus. In any case I have always found it difficult to believe that we modern scholars understand the Greek of the New Testament better than the early Greek Fathers themselves!⁹

These reasons are only a start towards giving a full answer to the question, "Why study the Fathers?" There are certainly other reasons for studying these ancient authors which may be more obvious or even more important. But the reasons given above sufficiently indicate the need for Patristic studies in the ongoing life of the Church: to aid in her liberation for the *Zeitgeist* of the twenty-first century; to provide a guide in her walk with Christ; to help her understand the basic witness to her faith, the New Testament.

One final point needs to be made, though. The Fathers are not Scripture. Due to the misuse of the Fathers in the Middle Ages by the Roman Catholic Church in their being placed on an equal level with Scripture, the Reformers argued that the writings of the Fathers must be subject to Scripture. As John Jewel (1522-1571), Anglican apologist and erstwhile opponent of the Puritans, who, writing in 1582, well stated:

But what say we of the fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, Hierome, Cyprian, &c.? What shall we think of them, or what account may we make of them? They be interpreters of the word of God. They were learned men, and learned fathers; the instruments of the mercy of God, and vessels full of grace. We despise them not, we read them, we reverence them, and give thanks unto God for them. They were witnesses unto the truth, they were worthy pillars [sic] and ornaments in the church of God. Yet may they not be compared with the word of God. We may not build upon them: we may not make them the foundation and warrant of our conscience: we may not put our trust in them. Our trust is in the name of the Lord.¹⁰

In this issue we especially look at two of those Fathers known as the Cappadocians—there are two papers on Basil of Caesarea (c.330-379) and one on his disciple Amphilochius of Iconium—along with the Syrian ascetic writer Macarius-Symeon, who was known to Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.331/340-c.395). A final paper deals with the important subject of divine simplicity as it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. Special reference is made to the Fathers, but later figures like John Calvin (1509-1564) also make an appearance. 

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1 *Jesus Rediscovered* (London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1972), 204. As to whether or not his conversion was genuine I leave this question to one side at this point.

2 See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Promise of Patristic Studies” in David F. Wells and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Toward a Theology for the Future* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1971), 125–127.

3 C.S. Lewis, “De descriptione temporum” in Walter Hooper, ed., *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969), 12.

4 *Letter to Serapion* 3.1.

5 *Catechesis* 4.25.

6 *Diognetus* 9.2-5.

7 Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 33–38.

8 Thus Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 62.

9 *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1976), xii.

10 Cited in Barrington R. White, “Why Bother with History?” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 4 (July 1969), 85. For detailed help in knowing how to study the Fathers, see especially Jean Daillé, *A Treatise On The Right Use Of The Fathers In The Decision of Controversies Existing At This Day In Religion*, trans. Rev. T. Smith and ed. G. Jekyll, 2nd ed. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1843).