

THE LIFE AMPHILOCHIUS OF ICONIUM:
A GREAT CAPPADOCIAN

**Friendship, of itself a holy tie
Is made more sacred by adversity.**

John Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther*, III.1.47

. . . there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18.24b

Introduction

It is often the case that the sands of time eradicate the works of great men and women, leaving behind to the generations that follow only faint echoes of their memories and shadows of their beauty. One such victim of time's steady march is Amphilochius of Iconium. Very little is known about Amphilochius, and what is knowable can only be drawn from his few surviving treatises, the letters of the of those who claimed him as their friend, and from assorted brief references of him in early church histories. It is from these later two sources that this article seeks to develop a biographical sketch of Amphilochius. While a biography drawn from sources such as these will be skewed to the benefit of the subject, such a perspective is unavoidable since to date these sources provide the bulk of what may be discovered about this great late fourth and early fifth century defender of orthodoxy.¹

The Life of Amphilochius of Iconium

The birth of Amphilochius is generally dated by most scholars to have occurred ca. AD 340, and although these are but guesses there is little evidence to suggest that they are far from the mark.² A letter to Amphilochius from Basil of Caesarea implies that Amphilochius was

¹Amphilochius of Iconium is not to be confused with the lesser known but nearly contemporaneous Amphilochius of Side, who as an early fifth century bishop. See J. B. Lightfoot, "Amphilochius (2)" in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography*, ed. Henry Wace and William C. Percy (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 25.

²Sever J. Voicu, "Amphilochius of Iconium," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1:32. Michael P. McHugh, "Amphilochius," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1997), 1:46. N.B.; hereafter, all dates should be understood as *anno Domini*.

born in Cappadocia.³ Some have suggested that he was born into a wealthy family.⁴ His father, who was also named Amphilochius, was an imminent lawyer. His mother Liva died relatively early in life, leaving behind Amphilochius and his two siblings, a brother named Euphemius and a sister apparently named Theodosia.⁵ He is thought to be the cousin of the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nazianzus.⁶ Very little is known regarding his childhood. He was well educated, having studied in Antioch under the great fourth century rhetorician Libanius and afterwards, sometime in 364 or 365, he began to practice law in Constantinople. That he was more than adequately educated was testified to by Jerome, who stated that Amphilochius was not only literate,⁷ but concerning his literary skill remarked, “and of the Cappadocians Basil, Gregory, and Amphilochius. All these writers so frequently interweave in their books the doctrines and maxims of the philosophers that you might easily be at a loss which to admire most, their secular erudition or their knowledge of the scriptures.”⁸ Johannes Quasten has stated that evidence of Amphilochius’s rhetorical acumen is observable in several of his few surviving homilies.⁹

Education and intelligence, however, does not always translate into good business sense. At some point during his career Amphilochius participated in a business venture that for

³ Basil, *Letter CLXI*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, in *Loeb Classical Library* [LCL] vol. 215 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 413.

⁴G. Röwekamp, “Amphilochius of Iconium,” in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, trans Matthew O’Connell (New York: Crossroads), 22.

⁵ Basil, *Letters: 186-248*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, in *Loeb Classical Library* [LCL] vol. 243 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

⁶Blomfield Jackson, “Prolegomena,” in Basil, *Letters and Selected Works*, trans. with notes Blomfield Jackson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF²], American ed., vol. 8 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1895; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), ix.

⁷Jerome *Lives of Illustrious Men*, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF²], American ed., vol. 3 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1892; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 384.

⁸Ibid., *Epistle 70*, in *Letters and Selected Works*, trans. W. H. Freemantle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF²], American ed., vol. 6 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1892; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 151.

⁹Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Spectrum, 1960), 3:298-99.

reasons unknown went sour. The affair was such a disaster that Gregory of Nazianzus felt compelled to write letters to Caesarius, the Quaestor of Bithynia, requesting that he provide protection for his cousins Eulalius and Amphilochius. His letter explained that his cousins were not the culprits behind the scandal but were in fact its victims. Gregory's request was straight forward, asking that

Undertake a most righteous protection of my dear cousins, who are worried more than enough about a property which they bought as suitable for retirement, and capable of providing them with some means of living; but after having completed the purchase they have fallen into many troubles, partly through finding the vendors dishonest, and partly through being plundered and robbed by their neighbours [*sic*], so that it would be a gain to them to get rid of their acquisition for the price they gave for it, plus the not small sum they have spent on it besides. . . . the next best course would be to oppose yourself to the officiousness and dishonesty of the man, that he may not succeed in gaining one advantage over their want of business habits, either by wronging them if they retain their property, or by inflicting loss upon them if they part with it.¹⁰

Gregory also took specific care to write to Caesarius a letter of recommendation on behalf of Amphilochius, in which he affirmed the honesty of his cousin by writing,

I therefore, present to you with my own hand my most precious son Amphilochius, a man so famous (even beyond his years) for his gentlemanly bearing, that I myself, though an old man, and a Priest, and your friend, would be quite content to be as much esteemed. What wonder is it if he was cheated by a man's pretended friendship, and did not suspect the swindle? For not being himself a rogue, he did not suspect roguery, but thought that correction of language rather than of character was what was wanted, and therefore entered into partnership with him in business. What blame can attach to him for this with honest men? Do not then allow wickedness to get the better of virtue; and do not dishonour my grey hairs, but do honour to my testimony, and add your kindness to by benedictions.¹¹

The above letter apparently was insufficient to establish Amphilochius's good character.

Consequently, Gregory wrote a second letter of recommendation to Caesarius in which he again defended Amphilochius,

¹⁰Gregory of Nazianzen, *Epistle XIV*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallon. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF²], American ed., vol. 7 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1894; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 458.

¹¹*Ibid.*, *Epistle XXIII* (NPNF² 7:458).

For I should not have needed many words in pleading for my most honourable son Amphilochius with Your Magnanimity. I should rather have expected some strange and incredible thing to happen than that he would do anything dishonourable, or think of such a thing, in a matter of money; such a universal reputation has he as a gentleman, and as wiser than his years. But what must he suffer? Nothing escapes envy, for some word of blame has touched even him, a man who has fallen under accusation of crime through simplicity rather than depravity of disposition. But do not allow it to be tolerable to you to overlook him in his vexation and trouble . . . but honour your country and aid his virtue, and have a respect for me who have attained to glory by and through you; and be everything to this man, adding the will to the power, for I know that there is nothing of equal power with Your Excellency.¹²

It is a rather interesting that in Gregory's estimation Amphilochius was "wiser than his years," but when it came to money matters he apparently was quite naïve. Whether the real estate venture and the alleged "crime" were part of the same business failure, or involved different debacles, it is apparent that the impact of this failure or failures caused Amphilochius significant problems, and that rescuing his reputation was no easy endeavor for Gregory. In light of these events, it seems reasonable to assume that experiences such as these were influential in Amphilochius's desire to retreat from secular life and take up the path of an acetic, a choice that some suggest he made ca. 370.¹³

For a couple of years it appears that Amphilochius attempted to live ascetically in Ozizala, which was near Nazianzus. In the eyes of a friend named Heraclidas, however, Amphilochius was not very successful. Heraclidas was pivotal in Amphilochius's life because at some point, possibly during the time that Amphilochius was looking for partners to join with him in retiring from public service, he and Heraclidas had made an agreement that together they both would devote their lives to the better life of asceticism. Neither of the two seems to have been very successful in the endeavor. Through providence, however, Heraclidas came upon a commune founded by Basil of Caesarea where he was fortunate enough to sit under the

¹²Ibid., *Epistle XXII* (NPNF² 7:464).

¹³G. Röwekamp, "Amphilochius," 22. See also the introductory remarks to *Epistle XXV* in, Gregory of Nazianzen, *Epistle XXV* (NPNF 7:467).

instruction of the great Cappadocian Father. It appears that during this time Heraclidas recommended Amphilochius to Basil, which motivated Basil to help Heraclidas draft a letter inviting Amphilochius to join them in Caesarea.¹⁴ In this letter Heraclidas barbed Amphilochius for his inability to practice asceticism, writing that “When you mentioned agreements, and announced that you would be the accuser, you made me laugh in spite of my present dejection, because you still play the role of a public man and have not given up cleverness.”¹⁵ Possible evidence that Amphilochius did not remain completely devoted to asceticism can be found in a letter from Gregory of Nazianzus to Amphilochius, in which Gregory sought tax relief for a deacon under his jurisdiction. At the time Amphilochius was apparently functioning as one of the province’s chief magistrates. The date given for this letter is 372,¹⁶ which falls squarely in the period that some have suggested that Amphilochius was supposed to be devoted to the ascetic life, which was from 369 to 373.¹⁷

The invitation that Basil extended through Heraclidas proved to be fateful, for it forever changed the course of Amphilochius’s life. When Basil helped Heraclidas write his letter Amphilochius was caring for his retired father. Heraclidas was so impressed with Basil and his teachings that he exhorted Amphilochius to find a way to be temporarily released from the responsibility of caring for his father and to join him so that together they may receive instruction from the great Basil. He closed his letter with this enticing encouragement,

And I know that, if you were not chained by the obligation of caring for your aged father, you yourself would have preferred nothing [more than] to a talk with the bishop . . .
Wherefore, if you will permit me to advise you, you will press upon your father to permit

¹⁴There is no evidence that Basil was personally familiar with Amphilochius when he wrote this letter for Heraclidas, although he may have heard about Amphilochius through Amphilochius’s cousin Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory, however, confessed that he regretted not being more familiar with Amphilochius during his younger years. See Gregory of Nazianzen, *Epistle XIII* (NPNF² 7:467).

¹⁵Basil, *Letter CL*, (LCL 215: 365).

¹⁶Gregory, *Epistle IX* (NPNF² 7:466-67).

¹⁷J. B. Lightfoot, “Amphilochius (1),” in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography*, ed. Henry Wace and William C. Percy (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 23.

you to leave him for a little while and to betake yourself to a man who both knows much from the experience of others, as well as from his own wisdom, and can impart it to those who come to him.¹⁸

This letter provides an interesting comparison between the asceticism commonly practiced during this period—which was the practice of individual secluded asceticism—to that of the socially concerned communal life modeled by Basil. Heraclidas’s remarks that if Amphilochius knew what Heraclidas was learning he would encourage Heraclidas not “to leave this person and go wandering in the desert. For while the cave and the rocks will wait for us, yet the aid which true men can give will not always abide with us.”¹⁹ This remark reflects Basil’s influence upon Heraclidas and distinguishes Basil’s approach to communal asceticism and social outreach from the asceticism of isolation that originated with Antony of the desert.²⁰

It seems that from the time Amphilochius received Heraclidas’s letter (ca. 372-73)²¹ things moved rapidly, for by 374 Amphilochius was occupying the see of Iconium, which was a newly appointed capital city of Lycaonia.²² The church in this city was without a minister because of the death of Faustinius their bishop, and as a result they asked Basil to help them find a replacement. This church, however, was outside of Basil’s jurisdiction; consequently he could only appeal for guidance to Eusebius of Samosata, who apparently had authority over the see of Iconium.²³ J. B. Lightfoot argued that Basil appealed to Eusebius with the hopes that he would be given the opportunity to install Amphilochius.²⁴ If true, then Basil’s strategy garnered his

¹⁸Basil, *Letter CL* (LCL 215:371).

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 258-59.

²¹Jonathon Paul Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stodck, 2001), 145.

²²Röwekamp, “Amphilochius,” 22. For a description of the city’s new reputation, see Basil, *Letter CXXXVIII* (LCL 215:325).

²³Basil, *Letter CXXXVIII*, (LCL 215: 325).

²⁴Lightfoot, “Amphilochius (1),” 23-24.

intended result, and shortly afterwards Amphilochius was installed as the bishop of Iconium, which was a city that was rising in importance. This was very distressing to Amphilochius's father, who apparently placed a deal of great blame upon Gregory of Nazianzus for the loss of his son to the episcopate. Gregory's responded to Amphilochius the Elder by stating that his grief over his son's promotion was inappropriate; and with regard to his son's ordination, that he and Amphilochius had been "equally tyrannized over by our common friend."²⁵ One could infer from Gregory's statement that it was largely Basil who had compelled Amphilochius to submit to the ministry. Gregory also explained that he was completely preoccupied with his father's death and funeral during that particular time, consequently he had very little involvement in the matter. He implored Amphilochius the Elder, therefore, to "put aside [his] grief" and to no longer blame him for the loss of his son to the bishopric.²⁶

Roy Deferrari argued that Amphilochius was not ordained at the time he commenced his ministry in Iconium.²⁷ Whether Amphilochius was ordained before or after he began his service at Iconium, it seems unlikely that he was a spiritual novice. As the letters above imply, others perceived him as a man of high moral character, and by his early to mid thirties he was already searching for a deeper spiritual life. If in fact he had not been properly ordained when took control of the Iconian see this condition did not persist long, for he was ordained no later than 374.²⁸ Basil's letter of exhortation to Amphilochius on the occasion of his ordination reveals that Amphilochius might have been a less than willing recruit, for in it he wrote,

He who even now has ensnared you with the inescapable nets of His grace, when, as you yourself admit, you are trying to escape, not us, but the expected call through us, and who has brought you into the midst of Pisidia, so that you may take men captive for the Lord

²⁵Gregory, *Letter LXIII* (NPNF²: 7:468).

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Deferrari's footnote 5 in Basil, *Letter CLXXXVI* (LCL 243:6).

²⁸See note 3 in Basil, *Letter CLXI* (LCL 215:411). For the dating of this letter see, Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 147.

and bring those who had already been taken captive by the devil from the depths into the light according to His will.²⁹

Given the condition of the church and the significant schisms that threatened her during this period it seems inconceivable that Basil would have considered promoting anyone to the position of bishop for any city unless he felt confident that such a man had already internalized the same orthodox faith as he. Regarding the importance of ordaining worthy men, Basil himself later wrote to Amphilochius and stated,

But since it is not easy to find worthy men, shall we not perchance, while wishing to have the prestige of numbers and to cause the church of God to be governed more strictly by more men, unwittingly cast the word into contempt by reason of the unworthiness of those called, and engender the practice of indifference among the laity!³⁰

If the current condition of the church was not a sufficient concern for Basil then his concern for that lost was, and the above admonitions clearly bear this out. The shepherding of souls is not wisely conferred upon a novice, and Basil was not the type of spiritual leader who would have surrendered the authority of a bishop into untested hands. Knowing the ministry that awaited Amphilochius required a strong leader, Basil fully encouraged Amphilochius to fulfill his duties as such and exhorted him to,

Play the man, then, and be strong, and go before the people whom the Most High has entrusted to your right hand. And like a wise helmsman who has assumed the command of a ship, rise superior in your resolution to every blast that is stirred up by the winds of heresy. . . . For Christ sent you forth, not to follow others, but yourself to guide those who are on the way to salvation.³¹

Basil's concern for Amphilochius was not solely for the flock under his care, but for Amphilochius as well, for it appears that in the relatively brief time they spent together Basil came to deeply care for him. This is observable through Basil's description of his relationships

²⁹Basil, *Letter CLXI* (LCL: 215:411).

³⁰*Ibid.*, *Letter CXC* (LCL 243:71-72).

³¹*Ibid.*, *Letter CLXI* (LCL: 215:414-15).

with Amphilochius as akin to that of a father's affection towards his beloved son. Basil enjoyed Amphilochius's company so much that he often extended to him a most gracious open door policy, in one particular letter he wrote, "If you wish to visit us soon, do not await a suitable occasion nor the summons from us, knowing that to a father's heart every occasion is good for the embracing of a well-beloved child and that his soul's affection is a better summons than any spoken word."³² It is true that Basil, as with many other patristic authors, was at times given to embellishment, however, as one reads his letters to Amphilochius it is clear that he wrote to his understudy with a significant degree of sincerity and concern.

It also appears that Basil's was not the only heart that was closely knit to Amphilochius, for many within Basil's commune apparently enjoyed Amphilochius and wished him to come often and stay long. This is seen in Basil's *Letter CLXXVI*, which is also dated ca. 374.³³ The occasion of the letter was to invite Amphilochius to join the church at Caesarea for the festival of St. Euphrosyne (a visit that in the following years became an annual tradition). In this letter Basil wrote,

For be assured, my most honoured and truly cherished brother, that although our people have had [the] experience of many visitors, they insist upon the visit of no one so urgently as they do upon your coming; so potent was the barb of love which you implanted in them on the occasion of the former brief visit. In order, therefore, that the Lord may be glorified, the people made happy, the martyrs honoured, and we old men receive the deference due to us from a true son, deign to come to us without hesitation. The day is the fifth of September. Accordingly, we urge you to arrive three days beforehand . . .³⁴

It seems clear, therefore, that for many within Basil's sphere of influence there was a place of honor for Amphilochius. If, however, this was not true of the entire community, and there is no evidence to the contrary, then there was certainly a special place of honor for Amphilochius within the heart of Basil.

³²Ibid., 415.

³³Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 147.

³⁴Basil, *Letter CLXXVI* (LCL, 215: 459-60).

During his first couple of years in the ministry Amphilochius leaned heavily upon his mentor, for he often requested direction from Basil concerning a liny of issues, and Basil was more than willing to assist him. Examples of Basil’s guidance can be found in his three long canonical letters to Amphilochius (*Letters CLXXXVIII, CXCIX, and CCXVII*). These letters addressed a wide range issues regarding church discipline, touching on topics such as the treatment of heretics,³⁵ abortion,³⁶ sexual perversion,³⁷ manslaughter,³⁸ adultery,³⁹ exposure,⁴⁰ and apostasy.⁴¹ That Basil felt the need to write canons regarding these sins, and that Amphilochius felt the need to have them addressed leaves one to wonder about the memberships that comprised fourth century congregations. Church discipline, however, was not the only issue that Amphilochius desired Basil to address. Other letters from Basil to Amphilochius addressed philosophical and theological subjects such as the essence of the mind (*Letter CCXXXIII*),⁴² epistemology and faith (*Letter CCXXXIV* and *Letter CCXXXV*),⁴³ and the mystery of Jesus’ divinity and the limitation of his knowledge (*Letter CCXXXVI*).⁴⁴ It was during Amphilochius’s first year of ministry, however, that the church benefited the most from his dependence upon Basil, for it was in that year that Basil composed and dedicated to Amphilochius his greatest theological contribution, the book *De Spiritu Sancto*.⁴⁵ Although the book was finished in 374,

³⁵Ibid., *Letter CLXXXVIII* (LCL, 243:9).

³⁶Ibid., 21.

³⁷Ibid., 29.

³⁸Ibid., 43.

³⁹Ibid., *Letter CXCIX* (LCL, 243:113).

⁴⁰Ibid., 125.

⁴¹Ibid., *Letter CCXVII* (LCL 243:257).

⁴²Ibid., *Letter CCXXXIII* (LCL 243:365-67).

⁴³ Ibid., *Letter CCXXXIV* (LCL 243:371-77). *Letter CCXXXV* (LCL 243:377-85).

⁴⁴Ibid., *Letter CCXXXVI* (LCL 243:387-95).

⁴⁵Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 149.

Amphilochius did not receive his personal copy until late 375 because he requested that it be written on parchment.⁴⁶

It was not long before Amphilochius was able to put the theology found in Basil's theological treatise to good use, for at the synod of Iconium in 376 he took a stand against the Macedonians, a group also referred to as *Pneumatomachi*, i.e., "fighters against the Spirit." The result of this synod was the commissioning of Amphilochius to compose a letter defending the deity of the Holy Spirit to the see of Lycia. This particular letter is the least disputed literary work of Amphilochius, in it he contended for the deity and consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit by employing arguments that are also found in Basil's famous work.⁴⁷

It is likely that the teachings of heretical groups such as the Macedonians and others constantly motivated Amphilochius to be a regular student of Basil. Regarding Amphilochius's hunger for learning and knowledge, Basil himself wrote, "But we have marveled alike at your zeal for knowledge and your humility, in that you not only consent to learn, although you have been entrusted with the office of teaching, but also to learn from us, in whom there is nothing great in the way of knowledge."⁴⁸ Although Amphilochius was highly educated and had attained an office that possessed authority and commanded respect, his humble thirst for knowledge could not be filled. He was a sponge that was willing to soak in all that Basil could pour.

Dependence, however, did not travel on a one-way road in the relationship between Basil and Amphilochius. Basil had not recruited a journeyman, but a leader in whom he could depend. A clear example of this can be found in *Letter CCXVIII*, dated 375,⁴⁹ in which Basil entrusted to Amphilochius the responsibility of investigating several men in Lycia for the purpose of enlisting them for the cause of orthodoxy. Regarding Amphilochius's wisdom and

⁴⁶Basil, *Letter CCXXXI*, (LCL 243:363). Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 148.

⁴⁷Quasten, *Patrology*, 297.

⁴⁸Basil, *Letter CXCIX* (LCL 243:105).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, *Letter CCXVIII* (LCL 243:267-269). Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 148.

abilities as a leader, Basil wrote to him confessing that “For many reasons do I desire to meet you, both that I may employ you as an adviser on the matter in hand and in general that, beholding you after a long time, I many have some consolation for your absence.”⁵⁰ Another confirmation of Basil’s respect for Amphilochius’s leadership can be found in *Letter CXC* (dated 374⁵¹) in which he wrote, “You have cared for the affairs of the Isaurian church in a manner worthy of your decorum and zeal, of which I am ever an admirer.”⁵² In the same letter Basil also conferred upon Amphilochius the responsibility of supervision over the new bishop of the Isaurian church.⁵³ Even as late as 376, Basil looked admirably upon Amphilochius’s ministry, and characterized it as “peaceful,” when compared to the heretically fractured and sometimes physically violatate environment that plagued his own ecclesiastical district.⁵⁴ In *Letter CCXXXII* Basil wrote, “Therefore, we render thanks to the Lord, having learned that you are well of body, and that for your church which is at peace you have performed the commemoration of the saving incarnation.”⁵⁵

While Basil admired Amphilochius’s ability as a spiritual shepherd, he also valued him as a friend in whom he could confide. He simply trusted Amphilochius, and said things to him that he could not have said to many others. An example of Basil’s willingness to let down his guard with Amphilochius is found in his *Letter CCXXXI* in which he referred to one of his opponents as a “fat sea monster” and an “old mule driver.”⁵⁶ Basil could also laugh at himself with Amphilochius, as is observable in his reply to Amphilochius’s description of him as being

⁵⁰Ibid., *Letter CCI* (LCL 243:139).

⁵¹Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 147.

⁵²Basil, *Letter CXC* (LCL 243:71).

⁵³Ibid., 73.

⁵⁴Regarding physical violence see, Basil, *Letter CCXLVIII* (LCL 243:481).

⁵⁵Basil, *Letter CCXXXII* (LCL 243:363. For the dating of this letter see, Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea*, 149.

⁵⁶Ibid., *Letter CCXXXI* (LCL 243:361).

in good health. In response Basil wrote, “And that by sweetmeats you testify to my being of ‘good health’ in all respects. For it is not for me at least at my age to be munching, since my teeth have long ago been worn away by time and ill-health.”⁵⁷ For Basil receiving a letter from Amphilochius was a truly significant event that commanded his immediate attention. Regarding the reception of a letter from Amphilochius, Basil wrote, “having brought back my broken body and being considerably afflicted in soul, when I took into my hands the letter of your Piety I straightway became forgetful of everything, since I had received symbols of both the sweetness voice of all to me and also of the dearest hand.”⁵⁸ References to the deep bond of friendship between the two are too numerous to list, being contained in almost every correspondence to Amphilochius from Basil’s hand.

Just as numerous are Basil’s sincere exhortations to Amphilochius to travel the almost 300 kilometers between Iconium and Caesarea to visit the aging Basil. Many of these invitations warn Amphilochius that procrastinating over visits to Caesarea could prove to be fatal because of Basil’s failing health. Whether he was being manipulative or honest, one can only guess. Given his poor health during the years of his friendship with Amphilochius, there were undoubtedly times when Basil felt that his warnings should be taken seriously. What is not open to speculation, however, is Basil’s sincere desire to have his heart soothed by the company of one who was not only a fellow soldier in their common struggle to preserve orthodoxy, but who was also a favorite son and a beloved brother, whose presence brought a healing balm to an aging man who in the sunset years of his life was besieged by ecclesiastical and heretical strife.

Basil’s desire for close friendships united in orthodoxy was a goal that was often frustrated throughout his ministerial career. Regarding Basil’s value of such friendships Caroline White has written,

⁵⁷Ibid., *Letter CCXXXII* (LCL 243:365).

⁵⁸Ibid., *Letter CCXVII* (LCL 243:242-43).

The application of such words to the context of Church politics reflects Basil's desire to restore the Church to a kind of close friendship where all the members of Christ's body are united as close friends dedicated to serving God according to the true faith. His aim is well illustrated by his exhortation to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium in Ep. 191 to call together men of like mind so that by meeting together they may then be able to govern the churches by the old kind of love, communicating with one another as with intimate friends. In this letter Basil also refers to Matt. 24:12 and to John 13:35: by loving one another as friends Christians not only show themselves to be faithful followers of Christ but also maintain the unity of the body of Christ. Ideally mutual love among men and universal allegiance to the true faith would combine so that the Church would form a perfect realisation [*sic*] of the body of Christ but, as it is, many men fail on one of both of these scores . . . and this explains, according to Basil, the lamentable state of the Church in his day.⁵⁹

Knowing the many failed friendships in Basil's life (e.g., Eustathius of Sebaste and Gregory of Nazianzus⁶⁰) and the damaging impact they had upon him, one can begin to understand the why Basil highly valued his relationship with Amphilochius.

Although Amphilochius's life appears to have been constantly absorbed by critical issues of ministry, theological debates, and the personal disciplines of holiness and learning, he apparently was also a man who liked to stop and smell the roses—literally. In a series of letters from Gregory of Nazianzus one discovers that Amphilochius had green thumb, growing both vegetables and assorted flowers.⁶¹ Regarding the dating of these letters, *Letter XXV* reveals that Amphilochius had already been exposed to the teachings of Basil and that Basil was still alive and was able to become “hungry and irritated.”⁶² These letters, therefore, appear to have been written sometime between 373 and 379. While they contain no serious theological dialogue, they are valuable because they reveal that Amphilochius and Gregory had quite a sense of humor, and were willing to jest at one another's expense. Consequently, they give the reader a rare glimpse into the lighter side of the lives of these most serious of men.

⁵⁹Caroline White, *Christian Friendships in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 77.

⁶⁰For a detailed discussion of Basil's friendships and their significance see Rousseau, *Basil*, 233-69.

⁶¹Gregory, *Letter XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII* (NPNF²: 7:467-68).

⁶²*Ibid.*, *Letter XXV* (NPNF²: 7:467).

After the death of Basil data about the Amphilochius's life becomes rare. He is known to have attended the great ecumenical council of Constantinople in 381, which confirmed and expanded the Nicene Creed and once again condemned Arianism. At this council Amphilochius was listed as the "chief pastor of the Lycaonian church, at the head of twelve other bishops."⁶³ Regarding this council, Amphilochius is among the bishops listed in *Codex Theodosianus* who were complimented for their defense of orthodoxy and the Nicene Creed.⁶⁴ It was also around this time that Amphilochius is believed to have met Jerome and to have him a book titled, *On the Holy Spirit*, a book which some believe Amphilochius himself wrote.⁶⁵ If he indeed did write this treatise then—as is the case with so many of his works—it is no longer extant.

Around 383 Gregory of Nazianzus requested that Amphilochius take up the cause of a wrongly accused bishop, which he successfully accomplished.⁶⁶ It was also in 383 that Amphilochius took his most courageous stand, an event that not only reveals the character of the man, but also his keenness of mind. The account is recorded in Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* and is provided below in its entirety.

On the emperor's return the admirable Amphilochius, whom I have often mentioned, came to beg that the Arian congregations might be expelled from the cities. The emperor thought the petition too severe, and refused it. The very wise Amphilochius at the moment was silent, for he had hit upon a memorable device. The next time he entered the Palace [*sic*] and beheld standing at the emperor's side his son Arcadius, who had lately been appointed emperor, he saluted Theodosius as was his wont, but did no honour to Arcadius. The emperor, thinking that this neglect was due to forgetfulness, commanded Amphilochius to approach and to salute his son. "Sir," said he, "the honour which I have paid you is enough." Theodosius was indignant at the discourtesy, and said, "Dishonour done to my son is a rudeness to myself." Then, and not till then, the very wise

⁶³Lightfoot, "Amphilochius (1)," p. 24.

⁶⁴*Codex Theodosianus*, [on-line], accessed 13 October 2006; <http://web.upmf-grenoble.fr/Haiti/Cours/Ak/Constitutions/CTh16.html#1>; Internet. This codex is a book of Roman laws commissioned by emperor Theodosius II in 429.

⁶⁵Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* (NPNF² 3:384).

⁶⁶Gregory, *Letter LXIII* (NPNF²: 7:469).

Amphilochius disclosed the object of his conduct, and said with a loud voice, “You see, sir, that you do not brook dishonour done your son, and are bitterly angry with those who are rude to him. Believe then that the God of all the world abominates them that blaspheme the Only begotten Son, and hates them as ungrateful to their Saviour and Benefactor.

Then the emperor understood the bishop’s drift, and admired both what he had done and what he had said. Without further delay he put out an edict forbidding the congregations of heretics.⁶⁷

Whether Amphilochius’s plan brought about his desired change in political policy as quickly as Theodoret implied can be questioned. Theodosius, however, did issue an edict against the Macedonians, Eunomians, Apollinarians, and Arians in late 383.⁶⁸ What is more important to the current discussion, however, is that the narrative reveals Amphilochius’s brilliance and fortitude, for it was no small indifference to insult the emperor of the Roman Empire. One should call to mind that Roman emperors are known to have executed offenders for even perceived disloyalties, one such example being Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, who executed his own son.

The event also reveals Amphilochius’s commitment to eradicating heresies for the cause of orthodoxy. A reputation that followed him into the following centuries, for he is known to have combated not only the heresies previously mention (e.g., Arians and Macedonians), but also other assorted heresies such as the Apotactites and Encratites. Some of the last heresies he is known to have combated were that of the Messalians, Euchites, and Adelphians.⁶⁹ The conflict regarding these heresies climaxed at the synod of Side in Pamphylia, which occurred sometime between 383 and 390.⁷⁰ Messalians viewed the ordinances of the church as rather

⁶⁷Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History*. trans. Rev. Blomfield Jackson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF²], American ed., vol. 3 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1892; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 142.

⁶⁸Lightfoot, “Amphilochius (1),” p. 24.

⁶⁹Photius, *Bibliotheca* [on-line], accessed 12 October 2006, http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/photius_03bibliotheca.htm; Internet.

⁷⁰For the year of 383 see, Röwekamp, “Amphilochius,” p. 24. For the year of 390 see, Quasten, *Patrology*, p. 297. A. G. Gibson gives the year as 394, but he appears to have this year confused with the synod of Constantinople of 394, which Amphilochius also attended. See A. G. Gibson, “Amphilochius of Iconium, St. in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler *et al.*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 365.

powerless, with true spiritual power coming primarily through constant prayer and the fullness of the indwelling Holy Spirit. At the synod of Side Amphilochius presided over a collection of 25 other bishops, and under his leadership the synod successfully identified this extremist sect as heretical and subsequently condemned it.⁷¹ Quasten stated that Amphilochius is also thought to have withstood puritanical ascetic groups such as the Gemellites, who among many things repudiated even trivial matters such as the owning of pets.⁷²

There are very few surviving literary works that can be attributed to Amphilochius without a great deal of debate. One of the more interesting but debated works attributed to him has import regarding the New Testament canonical debate in the fourth century, it is the poem titled *Iambi ad Seleucum*, which has survived with the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus. The age of the surviving codices and fragments that contain the poem date predominately from the tenth through the sixteenth century.⁷³ Although the work is found with the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, ironically only one manuscript identifies him as its author (Codex B, fourteenth century). The rest of the manuscripts containing inscriptions that identify the poem's author attribute the work to Amphilochius (most notably Codex H, a tenth century manuscript).⁷⁴ Some view late testimonies such as inconclusive for proving authorship. However, the fact that the majority of the witnesses ascribe the poem's authorship to Amphilochius and not Gregory should give one pause. If one were inclined to fraudulently ascribe an author for this poem then Gregory and not Amphilochius would be the better choice since the poem was preserved among Gregory's writings. Gregory was also a poet, which also should have made him an obvious

⁷¹Photius, *Bibliotheca*, [on-line], accessed 12 October 2006, http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/photius_03bibliotheca.htm; Internet.

⁷²Quasten, *Patrology*, p. 297-98.

⁷³For a comprehensive treatment of the data regarding the poem's manuscript evidence see, Eberhard Oberg, *Amphilochius Iconiensis Iambe ad Seleucum*, in *Patristische Texte und Studien*, ed. K. Aland and W. Schneemelcher, vol. 9 (Berlin: Gruyter, 1969), 19-25.

⁷⁴Oberg, *Amphilochius*, p. 25.

choice for author of the poem.⁷⁵ Given that he was a more prominent leader of the church in his day would have unquestionably made him a better choice for the poem's author since his name would have secured a broader audience. However, the earliest and more frequent witnesses to the poem's authorship attest that it came from the hand of Amphilochius rather than Gregory.

With respect to the external evidence to the poem's authorship, one of the earliest witnesses is that of Cosmos Indicopleustes, a sixth century author and traveler.⁷⁶ Testimony such as this, however, fails to convince some, and given the lack of contemporaneous testimony they contend that it is "doubtful" that Amphilochius was the poem's author.⁷⁷ Conversely, others seem quite confident that the work originated from him.⁷⁸ Regrettably, incontrovertible evidence regarding patristic literature, especially of the kind which some demand, is hard to find. What is not controvertible, however, is that there is a different poem by Gregory of Nazianzus that provides his opinion regarding what constituted the authoritative New Testament. A comparison of the two poems clearly reveals a difference in attitude regarding the canonical New Testament and what books may be tolerated within that debate. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Gregory probably did not compose both poems. Consequently, if one felt the need to assign an author for *Iambi ad Seleucum* then Amphilochius seems a most reasonable candidate.

Regarding the New Testament canonical debate, the poem is clearly written from a fourth century eastern perspective since it defends the inclusion of the book of Hebrews but questions the reception of four of the seven catholic epistles and the book of Revelation.⁷⁹ Concerning the New Testament canonical debate, what makes the poem most interesting is that it

⁷⁵For an example of Gregory's poetry see, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Three Poems*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Denis Molaise Meehan (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 75:25-130.

⁷⁶Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christiana Topographia*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1858), 88:372-73. See also, Oberg, *Amphilochius*, p. 90.

⁷⁷Voicu, "Amphilochius," p. 32. See also, Lightfoot, "Amphilochius (1)," p. 24. "Amphilochius of Iconium," in *Catholic Encyclopedia* [on-line], accessed 12 September 2006; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01438a.htm>; Internet.

⁷⁸Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:298.

⁷⁹The epistles that are questioned in the poem are II John, III John, II Peter, and Jude.

is the earliest canonical list that provides the order of the entire New Testament as it is known today. Assigning a date for the poem is generally hard to achieve; in a rather strange attempt to do so some provide the date that is generally associated with Amphilochius's death, which is ca. 394 or later.⁸⁰ Such a date, however, is not well defended for if Amphilochius employed the poem for instructional purposes, which appears to be the case, then sometime during the middle years of his ministry would seem to be a more reasonable estimation. This would place the poem's composition in the mid 380's, possibly ca. 384 or even earlier.

The last record of an activity of Amphilochius is that of his attendance at the synod of Constantinople in 393, which dedicated the new basilica of St. Peter and St. Paul.⁸¹ He is believed to have died sometime between 394 and 404. During his day and in the centuries after, Amphilochius was respected as a bulwark of orthodoxy. Regarding the influence he had and the respect that he commanded, A. G. Gibson wrote, "His authority as a theologian grew during the early fifth century, and all the major councils after Ephesus (431) appeal to him as a source of patristic doctrine."⁸² Heinz Gstein has gone so far as to label him "the fourth Great Cappadocian."⁸³ It could be argued that his title for Amphilochius is somewhat ambitious. However, given the available data about him, data that clearly points in the opposite direction of Sever Voicu's rather disparaging assessment of Amphilochius,⁸⁴ he was by any reasonable standard of measurement a great Cappadocian in his time and for century that followed.

⁸⁰Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:298. Metzger, Bruce Manning, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 313.

⁸¹Lightfoot, "Amphilochius (1)," p. 24.

⁸²Gibson, "Amphilochius," p. 365.

⁸³Heinz Gstein, "Amphilochios von Ikonion," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* [JÖBG] 15 (1966): 135.

⁸⁴Voicu, "Amphilochius," p. 32.

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