

### 13 The Early Christian Church

Almost all of the information we have on the early years of the Church comes from the New Testament. The Letters of Paul and the other apostles are the earliest documents of the New Testament, and from them we can deduce the main features of the early church. The other parts of the New Testament, Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, Revelation were written in their present form at a time when the first generation of "eye-witnesses" was disappearing. The Acts of the Apostles is our main source for historical information about this period.

The first Christians were, like Jesus, Jews, and like Jesus they experienced opposition and "persecution" from the Jewish leaders. The early deaths of Christian "martyrs" (witnesses) recorded in Acts are the result of this conflict (Stephen, James). From the beginning the church actively spread its message, while the Jews felt that as the Chosen People, they had above all to keep themselves apart from the "gentiles" (other nations). The Jews were a recognized nation within the Empire, their religion was that of an allied people, but not liked because of its exclusivity. Christianity first found non-Jewish members among those who, tired of the official Roman religion, were interested in the monotheistic, historical faith of the Jews. The anti-legalistic teaching of Jesus ("Love one another"), the element of mystery offered by the proclamation of his Resurrection from the dead, the promise of salvation after death in his coming Kingdom, all had great appeal for such searchers after God. Where the Jews had demanded that those sharing their faith should be circumcised and keep all their complicated traditions and laws, the Christians only asked them to receive Baptism and believe in the faith taught by the Apostles, expressed in what is still called the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father almighty  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried,  
he descended into Hell,  
the third day he rose again from the dead,  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father almighty;  
He will come to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end;  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy, catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.

In each place there must have been varying traditions but it seems that everywhere the Church's main celebration took place in the night between Saturday and Sunday. In each local assembly (ekklesia) there was normally one episkopos (president of a council, giving the English "bishop") and a council of elders (Greek presbyteroi, from which comes the word "priest"). There were also diakonoi, deacons who serve the needs of the community in concrete ways, especially helping those who are poor or sick (the Greek root of "deacon" means "serve", as also that of the Latin "minister"). Some communities were certainly more democratic than others, and the bishops of Churches that had memories of having been founded by Paul or another of the Apostles felt particular responsibility for maintaining the purity of the Apostolic teaching. The assemblies seem to have sung hymns, read the Scriptures, and received instruction from the bishop. There were, of course, no special church buildings in the early centuries and it is difficult to imagine the practical solutions they found when

the numbers grew too large for ordinary houses to hold. At the end of the worship, after the Catechumens (people not yet baptized, but preparing for baptism) had left, the bishop presided the Sacrament of the Eucharist: a celebration at which, like Jesus during the Last Supper, he took bread and wine, gave thanks to God for the salvation brought by Christ, repeated the story of the Institution: "This is my body, this is my blood," and then distributed the communion. This was felt to be the supreme mystery of the Christian faith and no non-Christian was allowed to witness it. That may explain why John's Gospel has long passages about eating Jesus's body and drinking his blood, but does not report the actual story of the Institution. Later, when church buildings arose, the mystery was preserved by hiding the table (altar) behind curtains and screens, and forbidding ordinary people to come too close to it.

Very quickly, there were groups of Christians in all the main cities of the Roman Empire. When Paul arrived in Rome for his trial he was welcomed by members of the church there. The Greek and Latin word for "church", *ecclesia*, is that used for the Assembly in Greek democracy, and for great gatherings of Israel as God's People in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. From the beginning, there were people of every class, rich and poor, present at the worship and meetings of the church, offering possibilities for sharing wealth or for tensions. The Gospel spread amazingly rapidly, thanks in part to the ease of communications offered by the Empire's almost universal Greek.

### Persecutions and Martyrdom

Many people imagine that in the early centuries, Christians were always being fiercely persecuted. This is far from the truth. Except for the drama of Nero's accusation against the Christians after the fire of Rome in 64, Rome did not actively persecute the Christians. They were seen as part of the wider 'Jewish problem' and not something separate. Only later, as the number of Christians grew, and the ceremonies celebrating the living emperor as a god were developed, did conflict arise. It may be that in the East, where there were many Jews, they were able to make trouble for the Christians with the authorities, but this was not general. Thus Trajan, in his reply to Pliny's letter asking how Christians should be treated, told him that although the Christian religion was illegal (perhaps because it was "secret" and individual), he should not search for Christians, but act if one was accused directly (the accuser had to direct the prosecution and was punished if the case was found not proved).

The first century of the church's history is almost unknown to us apart from the New Testament. Sudden outbursts of persecution leave their mark in stories about heroic martyrs. In 155(?), in Smyrna (now Turkey) the 86 year-old bishop Polycarp (who was John's disciple) was seized and burned, although he was much respected in the city. In Lyons (France) in 177 a mob forced the martyrdom of 48 Christians, including the brave young slave Blandine. At this time, many people believed terrible rumors about the Christians' practices. They were said to murder children, eat human flesh, commit incest. Persecution was usually a result of some kind of mob-hysteria, not an official policy. Christians had by now begun to try to communicate their beliefs to educated Roman citizens, not merely to communicate faith, but also to explain that they were loyal citizens of the Empire and not rebels. By 180, we find many Christian groups in North Africa, where the church became for the first time Latin-speaking, Until then, even in Rome, it had mostly used Greek.

The first official, empire-wide persecution only came in 202, under Septimius Severus; it was launched for no clear reason, and there were martyrs in Alexandria, Rome, Corinth, and Carthage. It is not surprising that many of the onlookers at such scenes came away convinced that the martyrs' faith must be true. Many must have repeated the words heard when old Polycarp had insisted that he alone should be killed: "Look how much these Christians love one another; they are even ready to die for each other."

Those who were killed professing faith in God were thought to have died like Jesus, and so they began to be called 'martyrs' (witnesses) and 'saints' (holy people) although Paul had used the word 'saint' to describe every Christian who had been baptized. People began to venerate the bodies and tombs of the saints, as well as cloths dipped in their blood. Catechumens who were killed before

baptism were said to have undergone a 'baptism of blood'. Believers who were imprisoned and tortured but not killed were often referred to as 'Confessors' and treated with special veneration after their release. In Rome, many martyrs were buried in the Catacombs, the underground corridors lined with tombs that were a popular place of burial.

In 212 the emperor Caracalla granted Roman citizenship to almost all the free inhabitants of the lands in the empire. Now, Roman citizens were obliged to acknowledge the gods of the empire, and to make the offerings of the cult of the emperor as god. For a time, this problem was not acute, and it is in these years that Christians first built special buildings for their worship in Asia Minor.

### Early Christian Thinkers

At this time, office in the church was becoming socially desirable, many new converts were coming for instruction and baptism, and new thinkers were arising. Irenaeus, a pupil of Polycarp, and bishop of Lyons after the martyrdom of 177 until his death in 202, wrote a number of theological works, especially a defence of Christianity against the Gnostic heresy. He is sometimes called the "first systematic theologian." His most celebrated saying is: "The glory of God is Man alive."

Origen (185-255) is perhaps the first major Christian intellectual, although much of what he wrote is now lost. He was born and lived in Alexandria, where his father was martyred in 202. He became head of the Catechetical School but was later (231) obliged to settle in Palestine. During the great persecution under Decius (250) he was tortured and he died soon afterwards. He was a controversial figure because of the originality of his thought. He was interested in the textual criticism of the Bible, and wrote commentaries on the Scriptures. a presentation of basic Christianity, an apology for Christianity (Contra Celsum) in reply to an earlier pagan attack. He was highly esteemed by the writers who followed him, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil, and Eusebius.

Quite unlike him, while living at the same time, was Tertullian of Carthage (160-240). He was born into the old world, attracted by the rigours of Stoicism, then became a Christian attracted by the purity of life and the spirit of the martyrs. He was a lawyer by training, a rhetorician, and his many writings in Latin are a brilliant expression of the most "puritanical" form of non-conformist Christianity. He was by nature an extremist, he joined the most radical groups, expecting the destruction of the evil world at any moment, he resisted any compromise with the pagan world and its culture. The West received much of its thought on politics and religion from him.

### Persecutions and Victory

In 250, at a time when the Empire was threatened with Germanic invasion, the emperor Decius called on all citizens to sacrifice to the gods. Those unable to produce a certificate proving that they had offered the sacrifice would be punished. In the cities, the Christians were unprepared for this, and many chose to make the sacrifice, which made them guilty of apostasy. Much worse was to come. The next emperor, Valerian, from 257-9 set out to suppress Christianity and enforce the cult of the Roman gods. This was the worst of all the persecutions in the West, many died, perhaps the emperor was tempted by the wealth of the church, which was already considerable.

The final struggle came in 303, when Diocletian ordered the destruction of church buildings, the confiscation of the Scriptures, and pagan sacrifice by the clergy. In 304 he even demanded a universal sacrifice. He realized that now Christianity had spread from the cities to the countryside, into Armenia and Persia, and was a real threat to the old religion. He felt that the present problems of the Empire came from neglect of gods like Jupiter and Hercules, and the presence of "foreign" religions seemed likely to displease them more. However, he ordered that people were not to be killed, and in 305 he abdicated.

It was only now that the word 'pagan' begins to be used to describe people who follow non-Christian religions. The word originally meant 'rural' and serves to remind us that Christianity spread much more quickly among the urban population of the Empire. 'Paganism' remained strong in the rural areas for many centuries, until it slowly declined into 'superstition' or 'popular religion' and ceased to be felt to be threatening.

In the East, anti-Christian activities continued for a few more years while Constantine was struggling against his rival Maximinus. The final triumph of Christianity came about in strange ways. Constantine believed like many Romans of his time that the sun was the one true God. This cult of the sun was widespread, with the resulting confusion between the physical sun and its symbolic uses; Christians still worship on Sundays. Constantine told Eusebius that he once had a vision of a cross combined with the sun, with the message 'In this sign, conquer.' In 312, when Maximinus could have stayed safely inside the walls of Rome, he suddenly emerged and was defeated at the Milvian Bridge across the Tiber by Constantine's much smaller army. This 'God-given' victory was decisive in Constantine's conversion to faith in Christ as the true Sun of Justice. Soon after it, he was instructed in a dream to use the 'Chi-Ro' symbol of Christ on his standards and coins as a sign of victory. The outcome of this process was Constantine's Edict of Milan (313), which is more than a simple declaration of tolerance for Christianity; it marks the beginning of the process by which orthodox, catholic Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius, who in 391 ordered the final closing of all temples and the abolition of pagan worship.

### The Teaching Church

After Origen, the most important name is that of Eusebius (260–340), who became bishop of Caesarea, in his native Palestine, in 314. Origen had lived his years of exile there and Eusebius admired him very much, most of what we know about Origen comes from him. Eusebius was close to Constantine, whom he admired. His vision and writings are mostly historical, his vision of history is of a conquest of Christian, biblical truth over pagan ideas. His Alexandrian education, though, meant that he respected the achievements of the ancient world, seeing in them a providential *Praeparatio Evangelica* (preparation for the Gospel, the name of a work in which he shows how even the best Greek philosophy, that of Plato, is equalled by the Bible). His main fame rests on his *Ecclesiastical History*, inspired by classical history, which traces the history of the church from its beginnings until 324. Eusebius is the model for all later Western ecclesiastical historians (Bede, for example), by his direct quotation of ancient records and authorities. Eusebius reflects the basic problem of the relationship within Christianity of the two cultures, biblical and classical. Within the church, however, there were other problems. The gravest of these were those forms of teaching called Arianism and Donatism. This latter divided the North African church after the Great Persecution (303-5) when some had surrendered copies of the Scriptures to the authorities (*traditores*, meaning 'surrenderers', from which the word "traitors"). Later, the extremists in the church refused to accept these people as members of the church, so that in the time of Augustine we find two parallel churches, the Catholic (ready to forgive) and the Donatist (strict, unforgiving followers of the bishop Donatus). Arianism, though, was an Eastern problem, Alexandrian in origin. Arius was a priest in Alexandria, and in talking of God he seems to have said that the Son, Christ, since he suffered and died, was obviously "inferior" to the Father who is above all that. At the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel, Christians had been challenged by Gnostics who had said that Jesus, being God, could not have been a "real" man. Now they were challenged by the idea that, being a man, Jesus could not "really" be God. Since the church has always wanted to stress that the Gospel is one of reconciliation between God and Man in Christ, ideas which deny one side of the equation matter. Yet the ideas taught by Arius seemed right to many, they spread by missionaries as far as the Germanic Goths who were later going to invade Italy.

Constantine wanted unity among the Christians, so in 325 over 200 bishops met in Nicaea (Turkey) with Constantine presiding to "settle" the problem. The result, eventually, was the "creed" that is called the Nicene Creed, declaring that the Son is "of one substance with the Father." This is the Credo sung in Masses by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven etc. It did not settle the problem, but with time Arianism melted away:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,  
Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things, visible and invisible,

and in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all worlds:  
God of God, Light of Light,  
True God of True God, begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made,  
who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered and was buried;  
the third day, he rose again, according to the Scriptures,  
he ascended into Heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He shall come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead,  
his kingdom shall have no end.  
And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,  
who proceeds from the Father (and the Son),  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified,  
he spoke by the prophets.  
I believe one holy, catholic and apostolic church,  
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins,  
and I look for the resurrection of the body,  
and the life of the world to come.

#### Ambrose and Augustine

The next important name is that of Ambrose (339-397) who was chosen to be bishop of Milan (Italy) before even he had been baptized. Before this he had been a local governor. He exerted great influence over emperors, especially Theodosius, with the aim of having a single, unified church uniting every person in the Empire. He was therefore opposed to "heretical" groups (Arians, Donatists etc.), to pagan religions, and to the Jews. He was outraged when the "Christian" Theodosius in 390 had 7,000 citizens of Thessalonica massacred in a theatre; he excluded him from the church and made him do penance. In writing and preaching, he drew on deep knowledge of Platonic philosophy, his sermons helped to convert Augustine, who was moved to tears by his hymns. Augustine (354-430) is the greatest figure in the transition from classical to medieval (and modern) culture. He was born in what is now Algeria and his mother, Monica, was a devout catholic Christian. He received a classical education and at 19, reading Cicero, discovered the possible depths of philosophy. He therefore turned away from the Christianity of his mother and began a spiritual pilgrimage in search of Wisdom which led him to Manichaeism. He began to teach rhetoric, teaching at Carthage, Rome and Milan. At Milan he was attracted by the Christianized Neo-Platonism of Ambrose, for his was a tormented psyche, intensely aware of the tensions and contradictions between the visible and the invisible, nature and Grace. In his Confessions, he tells how he was reading the Bible one day, when he found in Paul's Letter to the Romans a key to his distress and realized that he had become a Christian.

Returning to North Africa, he set up a kind of monastic community; in 391 he became a priest, against his will, and in 395 he became bishop of the town of Hippo where he served for 34 years. His mind was intensely active, he wrote many works designed to support the catholic doctrines against other groups (Donatists) and against the Gnostic Manichees. He left over 100 works, 200 letters, 500 sermons. The most famous of his works are the Confessions and The City of God. The Confessions (c.400) tell the story of his early struggles, his conversion and new life, in a vivid, emotional way. Intensely "personal" in a way nothing written before it had been, it is one of the great classics of spiritual autobiography. In many ways, Augustine invented "modern man" by the depiction of his

inner struggles, contradictions, and doubts in the Confessions.

In 410, Rome fell to the Goths, and for Augustine this seemed a sign of the end of the world, since Rome was for him the symbol of all civilized culture. So he began to write a book! *The City of God* (413-426) is the basic work in which Christianity and classical culture are united, thanks to Augustine's vision. This vision is literary in its use of language, Neo-Platonic in its fundamental approach, biblical in its teaching. Almost certainly, no book has marked Western culture so deeply. Yet Augustine is no easy writer, and his ascetic doctrine, his distrust of the physical world (he was deeply tempted by ambition as well as sensuality), his doctrine of the deep depravity of fallen humanity redeemed only by God's saving Grace, underlie the deep pessimism of what is often called Western Puritanism. Calvinism in particular was deeply influenced by his dualistic vision.

Because of Augustine's writings, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were essentially Neo-Platonic, without realizing it. Until the Renaissance almost none of Plato's works existed in Latin translation and they were not read in the West. Protestant theology remains deeply marked by his influence, in its doctrines of Grace, its concern with (double) predestination, its "other-worldliness", and its love of verbal discourse.

The other great name of these years is that of Jerome (348-420) who was more of a pure scholar than Augustine, who was an intellectual and a pastor. His character was even more complicated than that of Augustine; he found human relations very difficult. His teacher, Aelius Donatus, was the most famous "grammarian" of the age, he wrote two school books on grammar and rhetoric that were used throughout the Middle Ages. Jerome was baptized when he was a student and then went to the Syrian desert and learned Hebrew. He met the great teacher Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople, then returned to Rome, where he revised the style of the Latin New Testament then in use. In 385, he left Rome and travelled to Syria and Egypt to see the monastic communities living there, before settling for the rest of his life in Bethlehem with a community of Roman followers, men and women. There he completed the new translation of the Old Testament into Latin, based on the work of Origen, that became the official Latin Bible until the present age, known as the Vulgate. Jerome's style is the most classical of all the Christian writers, full of echoes of Cicero, Virgil, Horace.

## Into the Middle Ages

With the fall of Rome and the collapse of the Empire in the West, the "Dark Ages" came to Britain and Gaul. A number of writers were vital for the transmission of classical values. Orosius came from Spain to be with Augustine and at his suggestion wrote a Christian chronicle history of the world from its foundation, through the Roman empire, until the present (417), using Eusebius' and Jerome's works, and pagan histories. It was the basic work of history for the Middle Ages.

Macrobius (c.420), an otherwise unknown African official, left two works which the Middle Ages built on: his neo-platonic *Commentary on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis* (the "Dream of Scipio") by which medieval dream-visions and other dream literature were inspired; and his *Saturnalia* ("New Year's Party") which is a kind of didactic symposium centred on the meaning and importance of Virgil as the model Rhetorician, but covering many topics. In the Middle Ages it served as a kind of encyclopedia.

Another North African, Martianus Capella (c.410-430), composed a didactic treatise combining prose and verse (*Menippean Satire*), the "Marriage of Mercury and Philology" in which a personified Philology goes on a journey to heaven with her servants, the Seven Liberal Arts, to be married to Mercury who is god of Eloquence. It gave the idea of the heavenly-ascent allegory to the Middle Ages, and also the outline of the basic course of education in Grammar Schools and Universities until the 19th century: the Trivium of Grammar, Logic (or Dialectic), Rhetoric, after which a student became Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), and the Quadrivium of Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy, Music, after which he became fit to teach others, as Master of Arts (M.A.) or went on to study Philosophy

and Theology.

The other writer by whom the classics were transmitted to the West is Boethius (480-524). He was of a noble Roman family, and served as consul in 510. His was the last generation to be able to study the Greek classics in Greek, and one of his goals was to translate the works of Aristotle and Plato into Latin, with commentaries reconciling the differences between them. If he had succeeded, Western intellectual history would be different, there would have been no rediscovery of Aristotle in the 12-13th centuries, no ignorance of Plato in the Middle Ages, no rediscovery of him in the 15th century! But after having served under Theodoric the Ostrogoth, he was suspected of treason, put in prison, and finally executed. While in prison, Boethius wrote his immensely influential *Consolation of Philosophy*, a mixture of prose and verse, a dialogue in which the personified figure of Philosophy explains to him how philosophy enables him to live truly as a human being even in absurd and cruel situations such as his. The fundamental question explored in this book is the nature of true happiness. The work alternates sections in verse with the prose debate between Boethius (who takes the role of the blockhead who needs always to be instructed) and Philosophy.

Initially, Boethius thinks that everything is the work of Fortune, a personification of blind destiny, who turns the wheel that raises people to prosperity or plunges them into disaster. In which case there is no meaning and no justice in life.

In Book 3, Philosophy prays to God in a much-admired Platonic hymn, before showing Boethius that God is the perfect Good which can alone be the source of true happiness. God here is the Platonic Good rather than the Christian God, but Boethius stresses the omnipotent Providence that ensures that human lives are not unjustly subject to mere chance.

'You who rule the universe with everlasting law,  
founder of earth and heaven alike,  
who ordered time stand forth from out Eternity,  
for ever firm yourself, yet giving movement unto all.  
No causes were without you  
which could thence impel you to create this mass of changing matter,  
but within yourself exists the very idea of perfect good,  
which grudges naught, for of what can it have envy?  
You make all things follow that high pattern.  
In perfect beauty you move in your mind a world of beauty,  
making all in a like image,  
and bidding the perfect whole to complete its perfect functions.  
All the first principles of nature you bind together  
by perfect orders as of numbers,  
so that they may be balanced each with its opposite:  
cold with heat, and dry with moist together;  
thus fire may not fly upward too swiftly because too purely,  
nor may the weight of the solid earth drag it down and overwhelm it.  
You make the soul as a third between mind and material bodies:  
to these the soul gives life and movement,  
for you spread it abroad among the members of the universe,  
now working in accord.  
Thus is the soul divided as it takes its course, making two circles,  
as though a binding thread around the world.  
Thereafter it returns unto itself and passes around the lower earthly mind;  
and in like manner it gives motion to the heavens to turn their course.  
You carry forward with like inspiration these souls and lower lives.  
You fill these weak vessels with lofty souls,  
and send them abroad throughout the heavens and earth,  
and by your kindly law you turn them again to yourself  
and bring them to seek, as fire doth, to rise to you again.

'Grant then, O Father, that this mind of ours  
may rise to Your throne of majesty;  
grant us to reach that fount of good.  
Grant that we may so find light  
that we may set on you unblinded eyes;  
cast from our minds the heavy clouds of this material world.  
Shine forth upon us in your own true glory.  
You are the bright and peaceful rest of all your children  
that worship you.  
To see you clearly is the limit of our aim.  
You are our beginning, our progress, our guide, our way, our end.'

The work ends with a long discussion about the nature of Providence and the possibility of human freedom when everything is already known to God's eternal mind. The themes of the work are classical commonplaces, and the work is above all remarkable for its self-restraint; for although Boethius was certainly a Christian, he nowhere uses faith as an easy escape from difficult questions. He always refers to the possibilities available to the philosophical mind, whether Christian or not. King Alfred, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth, are among those who translated the *Consolation* into English. It was one of the most important works of "practical philosophy" in the Middle Ages, when many people were always struggling to understand the workings of "Fortune" and Providence in life.

Less familiar, but just as important, Cassiodorus (490-583) should be better known. He followed Boethius as consul and in other offices, then retired, after failing to create a Christian university in Rome. He spent at least 10 years in Constantinople, then returned and created a monastery on his land in Calabria (Italy), the Vivarium. The most important feature of this monastery, created at about the time when Benedict was founding the first Benedictine monasteries at Subiaco and Monte Cassino, is its stress on the intellectual activities of the monks. The Vivarium is above all vital for Western civilization by its library. Other monasteries, like that founded in North England in the following century by Benedict Biscop, followed its example, and these monastic libraries, hidden in remote areas, preserved the classical manuscripts that played a vital role in the moments of "Renaissance": that led by the monk Alcuin under Charlemagne, that of the 12th century (Abelard) which saw the founding of the modern universities, that of the 14th century led by Petrarch, that of the 16th century led by Erasmus. Cassiodorus also organized the translation of various Greek works into Latin.

The link between the scientific learning of Antiquity and its rediscovery in the high Middle Ages is very often Isidore of Seville (620-636), a bishop who wrote books about history, science, theology, but whose most important work was the *Etymologiae* or "Origins", an encyclopedia in the tradition of similar works by Boethius and Cassiodorus, in which he notes briefly everything he thinks worth knowing about everything.

Finally, Prudentius (348-405) was the writer of great Latin hymns and, most important, of the allegorical epic the *Psychomachia* (the battle of the soul) from which all medieval allegories and Morality plays derive, thanks to its portrayal of the soul torn between the forces of Good and Evil represented by personified Virtues and Vices, good and bad angels.