

History of Christian Education: Latin and Syriac Fathers

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Abstract: “Men learn while they teach.” Seneca

Christian education can be considered to have been advanced with the early church fathers who wrote in Latin. They made significant contributions in numerous areas of education, such as philosophy, religion, science, poetry, polemical language, rhetoric, establishing of school curriculums, and other literature. Their unique input to Christian education paved the way for greater development in educating the laity. By contrast the Syriac fathers aimed to make society more meaningful. They emphasized that good teaching and learning was Christocentric and help individuals to become good Christians. Their missionary approach to Christian education focused on apologetics, hymnology, homilies, and typologies as iconoclastic weapons to defend the Christian faith. Their theories are discussed to assist educators to adapt the concepts they employed, which, in turn, will impact classroom learning.

I. TERTULLIAN (AD 155-240).

Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Floren Tertulianus) was born in Carthage, North Africa (modern day Tunisia), around the year AD 160 to pagan parents (Morrison, 2013, p. 321). The society in which he lived was sloppy and corrupted with idolatry. His father used to be the leader of a Roman band in Africa, nicknamed “Proconsula Centurion.” He is considered to be the priest of Carthage and the father of theology in the Latin Church. He was one of the first Christian apologists (Pillet, 1881, pp. 100-102).

Highly educated and a prolific writer with excellent knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, Tertullian used his background to defend the Christian faith as an apologist. He was a controversial and uncompromising figure in the history of Christianity in *general* and to Christian education (CE) in *particular*. He permitted Christian children to attend the pagan school as “a matter of necessity but refused to let Christians teach in those same schools” (Anthony, & Benson, 2013, p. 86).

In his volume, *On Schoolmasters and Their Difficulties*, Tertullian “revealed his lack of patience for those who sought to integrate Greek philosophy with Christianity. From his perspective, it was a vain pursuit, and he believed that efforts would be better spent trying to find ways to live the Christian life better within society” (Anthony & Benson 2013, p. 114). While it is true that Tertullian saw philosophies as literature promulgating heresies, and truth cannot exist apart from the Bible, he also saw that this kind of literature needed to be studied (Binder, 2012, p. 145).

What Tertullian meant was that the Christian teacher must have what he called “literary education” but refrain from “commending,” “confirming,” and “bearing testimony” to it. The Christian teacher must not inculcate views that are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Ringma, 2013, p. 243). Teaching is more than transmitting information, it involves attesting to, believing, and affirming what is being taught. Tertullian challenges us today to show greater integration of our doctrines and the way we live in our various societal practices.

Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170-235)

Scholars disagree regarding the personality of Hippolytus of Rome and the writings attributed to him. There are two stories about the biography of this martyr, the first was that he was an officer and responsible to Laurence (AD 225-258) during his imprisonment (Hippolytus (Antipope), 1992, pp. xii-xvii). The second story says that he was a Roman priest who lived in the early third century (about AD 170-237) (Lodi, 2018, p. 266). In this capacity, he was a man of knowledge and one of the most important writers of theology in the early Roman Church. He was indebted to the theology of Irenaeus as he clearly indicated in his teaching on salvation (Roberts, 2007, pp. 7-8).

Hippolytus perceived CE first and foremost to be an act of home training. He said, “to take the child to school or to church must be treated as an act of the life of the whole community, as it was in Apostolic Church.” (von Bunsen, 1854, p. 126). For him, the whole community was responsible for raising an individual in the fear of the Lord and leading them to baptism. In holding this view, he placed CE as a corporate responsibility involving home, school, and church.

Hippolytus of Rome, together with Augustine of Hippo, “was responsible for establishing the patterns of education that shaped centuries of Christian catechetics.” (Bowden & Bowden, 2005, p. 369). In these catechetical schools, he placed great value on the Bible in contrast to tradition. The aim was to teach the Bible to enable students to discover the hidden treasure of God’s truth. The early years of training will shape the character of the child into the similitude of His Maker, Christ, and a deeper faith in His Word.

Cyprian of Carthage (AD 200-258)

Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus of Carthage was born in about AD 200 of wealthy parents. Little is known about

him until he met Caecilius, the Carthaginian who was an instrument in his conversion to Christianity in AD 246 (Schaff, 2017, p. 319). He was a young man when he embraced Christianity. Later he was elected a bishop of Carthage (Adogbo, 2010, p. 49). He found excellent theological guidance in the works of Tertullian, whom he called “the teacher.”

The education of Cyprian consisted of traditional grammatical and rhetorical education, and later he became a teacher of rhetoric. Cyprian’s works encompassed three themes of Christian catechesis: Book I, *Ad Quirinum* (Testimoniorum Libri Tres)ⁱ concerned “salvation historical,” the teaching that the new Israel replaces the old one; Book II, “doctrinal,” that focused on Christology; and Book III, “moral,” which dealt with the duties of the Christian life—this book was his significant contribution to CE (Ferguson, 2014, p. 15). Book III involved Cyprian’s “curriculum for Christian formation.” Book III emphasized *behavior* befitting a Christian, both to one another and to all others: i.e., support for one another (III.9), simple eating (III.6), detachment from possessiveness (III.61), living simply (III.36), paying just wages (III.81), charging no interest in loans (III.48), and refraining from retaliation if injured (III.23) (Smith, 2012, p. 64).

Cyprian gave “zealous attention to religious education and worked hard to eliminate certain abuses which had crept into the Church services” (Hastings, Selbie, & Gray, 2010, p. 869). The teachings of Cyprian relate to the religious teaching of CE, where he emphasized that *behavior* is part of church education. In daily practice, CE teaches the student and the teacher to behave like Christ. Catechesis and apologetic teachings have much in common, which conveys information about conversion in all aspects of life and how to act as a Christian. Thus, CE aims to teach the whole person, and this includes Christian behavior

Hilary of Poitiers (AD 300-368)

Hilary was born in Poitiers, and his family was from the nobles of Gaul (France). Jerome said, “education in Gaul flourished at that time” (Borchardt, 2013, p. 34). Hilary received a wealth of philosophical and classical education (Beckwith, 2008, p. 6). He said about himself that he grew up in a pagan background and gave a detailed description of the steps that God took with him to teach him about the true faith. Hilary believed, from a logical point of view, that a human being was a free creature but still aware of high principles, and hence subject in this world to practice patience, asceticism, and other virtues, which, if followed, entitled him to receive a reward after the end of this life (Weedman, 2007, pp. 74-118).

He strove with passion to learn about God, and quickly discovered that a multiplicity of deities constituted a false belief. He was convinced that there can only be but one God, and that he must be eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, the

first cause, and the creator of all things. It was against this background and with this belief that he engaged with the Bible and was deeply influenced by the lofty description used by Moses to describe God and especially the words that express His self-existence: “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14a) (Lienhard & Rombs, 2014, vol. 3, p. 20). He was a bishop of Poitiers, a theologian. He was a contemporary of Athanasius.

As an apologist, Hilary “defended the orthodox teaching of Christ at great personal cost and was known as the Athanasius of the West” (Ray, 1997, p. 123). He also, “defended orthodox Christianity against the heresy of Arianism” (Campion & Holleran, 1999, p. 89). Hence the title was given to him—the “Doctor of the Church.” One of his most significant contributions to CE was his work, *On the Trinity*, which was mostly concerned “with theological instruction on the Trinity as revealed in scriptural passages declaring the Son’s equality with the Father” (Mary & Clark, 2013, p. 527). The Bible, he said, should be the basis for teaching doctrines at theological schools. He was “indeed the first to bring western scholars a knowledge of the theological riches of the east” (Mary & Clark, 2013, p. 527). It seems that for Hilary the Scripture was foundational to his teaching and preaching, especially as seen in his defense of the Trinity doctrineⁱⁱ.

Ambrose of Milan (AD 337/340-397)

Ambrose of Milan was born in the year AD 340 of a pious family, as his father was the ruler of Gaul (France) during the reign of Constantine the Little. He lived in Treves (Maitland, 1835, p. 43). The biography of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (Ambrosius), indicates he displayed genuine spiritual care and reveals a life of one who rejected the glory of the world. He devoted all his knowledge and energies to building souls for the Lord. He aimed to live an ideal Christian life, hence the title, “the Doctor of Virginité.” Ambrose was “raised to be a skilled poet, orator, and lawyer” (Morgan, 1997, p. 45).

Ambrose’s “literary activities” were inseparable from his “social and political activities.” His chief focus was on oral communication rather than a written one. Ambrose “received a classic Roman education in which grammar and rhetoric were emphasized” (Salisbury, 2004, p. 26). He was an outstanding preacher and teacher of his time (Carey, 1978, p. 32). As an ecclesiastical teacher, his aim was to win people to Christ (Marique, 2008, vol. 1, p. 48). In his teaching, he made the Bible his textbook, for he said the “Holy Scripture is useful to everyone.”

His significant contribution to CE lies in his development of *De Officiis Ministrorum*, “On the Ministerial Office.” It provided one of first and the most important “Christian treatises dealing with the person and the work of the pastor” (Pasquarello III, 2015, vol. 1, p. 33). To him, pastoral duties were as essential as doctrinal issues. He

emphasized that the pastor should aim to “be” before he could purpose to “do.” “being” precedes “doing.”

He also focused on “music education.” The four authentic Church tones established by Ambrose were foundation in the education of the early church (Hawkins, 1868, vol. 1, p. 147). He was “a warm admirer of music.” (Ritter, 1892, p. 27). Consequently, the Ambrosian chant continued to be used as the music for the hymns and doxologies of the church for more than two hundred years. His contribution to music education has been a treasure of the church universal (Sanford, 1895, p. 27).

He focused on music education for the church and the catechetical schools. Ambrose saw no disagreement between music and the Bible and considered that any hymn could promote orthodoxy of the faith. He wrote hymns, sang, and “pioneered the singing of hymns in church” (Petersen, 2014, p. 239), which represents his integration of faith into religious education.

Pope Damasus I (AD 305–384)

Delany argues that Damasus was born in Rome, and it seems his father Antonius was of Hispanic origin and was a priest in Rome. Damasus made efforts to strengthen the episcopal center of Rome. Some consider his efforts to be outstanding in the emergence of the idea of the “Roman papacy” along with the efforts of Innocent I and Lyon I. He was elected the Pope of Rome in AD 366 (Delaney, 2012, p. 44).

He was also the first Pope to appeal to Matthew 16:18 as the claim for Papal prerogatives, and insisted that the Pope could be judged only by the emperor” (Macy, 2007, p. 310).ⁱⁱⁱ Damasus’ fourth treatise is called “Thomas Damasos.” It is a summary of the errors of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the person of Christ, recorded by a Roman council in AD 382 and sent to Paulinus, Bishop of Antioch (Schmidt, 2017, pp. 694-699).

The contribution of Damasus I to CE comes from the fact that he was instrumental in producing a new translation of the *Vulgate* Bible (Latin *vulgus*, meaning “common” or “plain”) (Wegner, 2014, p. 254). He wanted to get rid of the Old Latin version that contained inaccuracies. During his time, he also standardized worship services (Curtis & Lang, 1998, p. 46). This essentially was a form of educating the elite.

Damasus realized that the Second Advent of Christ was not imminent and observed that the eye witnesses of the life of Christ had died out. Thus, he opted to have the NT written down (Barron, Cleary, Harrison, & White, 2018, p. 34). Damasus wanted to have a church that was educated and sought to move from the old “oral tradition” to new “written resources.” This would aid in enforcing the “church’s development of doctrine, discipline, and worship, in Christian education and the inculcation of Christian morals.” (Grant,

2006, p. 46). Pope Damasus finally had his dream come true where “the Bible could be read by priests, bishops, and educated scholars and members of religious orders” (Doherty, 2015, p. 23). It also prepared them defend their faith In the words of Mike Aquilina, the Latin version “would settle arguments and at least keep the heretics honest.” (Aquilina, 2013, p. 47). By this method, Damasus aided the literate to read and they could teach the Bible to the illiterate. It helped to preserve the faith. The Bible to him was a standard for learning.

Another unique contribution to CE made by Pope Damasus was his construction of the first Christian Library in AD 366-384 (Allen, 2006, p. 102).^{iv} Damasus organized the repository of the church archives in the Church of Laurent. The library housed literature on rhetoric, poetry, language, and many Christian volumes and apologetics. It became a Christian center of learning and created a hub for education in general and CE in particular.

Jerome of Stridonium (AD 347-420)

Jerome’s (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus) was one of the greatest “Latin Fathers” of the West in his interpretation of the Bible. He contributed ascetic and dialectical articles against heretics. He was born around AD 342, in Stridon, on the borders of Dalmatia, Pannonia and Italy, to a wealthy and pious Roman family (Kraus, 2017, p. 16).

When he was twelve years old, his father sent him to Rome, where he excelled in eloquence, many writings, and he was passionate about the great poets of Greece and the Rome (Middleton, 1839, p. 301). He studied rhetoric, philosophy, Greek, and Latin. He was baptized into the Christian faith when he was about nineteen years of age (Jensen, 2012, p. 13). He became a distinguished scholar in classical literature. Because he was well-versed in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin and much classical literature, it was said about him, “What Jerome does not know, nobody knows!” (F. Peters, 2015, p. 771) He used his scholarly gifts for Christian purposes.

Jerome was the secretary of Damasus I and translated the Bible into Latin. His emphasis on CE was remarkable where he focused, among other things, on the education of girls. He highlighted “the ascetical and moral objectives of education at the expense of man’s earthly concerns” (Anthony, & Benson, 2013, p. 100). In turn, he influenced the Christian monastic schools that followed, so much so that later educators eventually had to adopt what is called “universal education.” (Ibid)

Wysocki notes that Jerome distinguished between two periods of education that accompany an individual’s life. The first phase was from an early “age up to seven years, when parents should concentrate on the accuracy and beauty of the language and teach the child to read and write.” The second was from “eight years of age up, when the psalter,

scripture, and strictly indicated canon of books should be the subject” of each student (Wysocki, 2015, vol. 2, p. 657). Jerome contended “that the education of the small child was the responsibility of his parents” (Verster, 2009, p. 59). This was on account of the child being a divine blessing from the marriage institution.

Jerome encouraged his students to learn other classical literature. He saw no dichotomy between pagan learning and the formation of Christian character. He believed that the two fields (pagan and Christian) complemented one another and were necessary instruments for Christian believers. According to Edward J. Power, Jerome told “generations of schoolboys to read the classics for style, to pick from the essential rules governing good speaking and writing, and ignore all else” (Power, 1991, p. 103).

He contributed to CE from a broader perspective. He covered various topics on history, Scriptures, exegesis, ecclesiastical matters, and apologetics—all aimed to integrate Christian faith into educational circles. His theme in teaching was the “fear of the Lord.” A. P. Sharma concurs that Jerome’s aim was “The soul must be educated as the temple of God and so the child must neither hear nor say anything except that which pertains to the fear of God” (Sharma, 1997, p. 44). He went one step further in implementing CE, when he used the sense of seeing plus that of touching (especially for learning disabilities). In teaching and training of beginners on how to learn the letters of the alphabets, he suggested that each letter should be cut out in boxwood or ivory shapes for the student to trace the letter and to get familiar with it. Such a powerful method in CE was later adapted by Montessori for teaching kids and used many centuries after him (Sharma, 1997, p. 44).^v

Jerome was a great teacher of his time, thus the title, the “Christian teacher” (J. Gmeiner, 1891, p. 4). For Hilmar Pabel, Jerome was “the teacher of Christian conduct, the opponent of heresies, the expositor of Scripture. To pass from the first to the last aspect of this theological profile is to drink more deeply from the well of *sacra erudition* [holy learning].” (Pabel, 2008, p. 172). He maintained that to complete preparation to become involved in CE, one needed to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Lynch, 2014, p. 47).

However, when asked the question, why Christians must visit the Holy City, Jerusalem? Jerome replied, “can we suppose a Christian’s education complete who has not visited the Christian Athens? [*i.e.*, Jerusalem].” (Tuchman, 2011, p. 24; see also Krewson, 2017, p. 118). The purpose of visiting the Holy Land was not only to learn of the geographical and historical significance but to experience its truth—the risen Saviour. He affirmed that CE, in its most preeminent features, was “spiritual in nature.” To him, CE prepares people to be good citizens of this world and for the world to come.

Because of his love for CE, Jerome established “a school for boys at Bethlehem and served as a spiritual guide

for numerous monks and nuns who settled in Bethlehem to be near him” (Reyes, 2014, p. 508). He “taught Greek and Latin to the children of Bethlehem, as his master Donatus had of old taught them to him.” (Ward, 2008, p. 221). The school focused on theology and made everyone know the Psalter by rote and learn some portions of the Bible. The Bible was used as a major textbook for teaching and correction.

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430)

Aurelius Augustine of Hippo was born in AD 354, to middle-class parents in the town of Thagaste (modern Souk Ahras, in Algeria) (Brown, 2000, p. 7). His parents gave him a classical education. Later in life, Augustine went to Carthage as a pagan believer to study rhetoric, and in AD 375, he returned to Thagaste to teach in that field. His life changed when he met Ambrose of Milan; he was baptized in AD 387 on Easter Sunday (Bigalke, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 98-99). In AD 391, in the city of Hippo, he was ordained against his will as a priest.

From AD 397-427, he wrote many volumes, starting with *Confessions* and ending with *On Grace and Free Will* and *On the Predestination of the Saints*. Augustine’s philosophical and theological writings made enormous contributions in the area of CE. He taught that knowledge or truth is an illumination from God. He held that the ultimate purpose of “education is directed toward God by investigating within oneself with regard to truth, and by strenuously testing one’s own interior truth, which is when the student truly learns” (Bigalke, 2015, vol. 1, p. 99).

In his volumes “On the Teacher” *De Magistro* and “On Christian Education” *De Doctrina Christiana*, he emphasized the theory of education and taught that truth is pre-existent, yet hidden (latent). The teacher’s task is to make manifest that which is hidden. He also recognized that humans by creation were unique in their reasoning ability. As a useful agent, reason helps us to get to know God. With regard to the teacher, Augustine stressed that he should be knowledgeable in all areas; that is, mathematics, logic, rhetoric, and language. Thus trained, they could develop valuable insights into divinity and the universe (Sharma, 1997, p. 45).

Education for Augustine had two aspects: *cogitare* (knowledge) and *scire* (understanding). Teaching, then, is a preparation for understanding, which is an illumination of the *magister interior* “interior teacher,” who is Christ. Truth can only be recognized through the *magister interior*, *i.e.*, Christ (Augustine, 1955, p. 285), and not through the teacher or the preacher who is the *magister exterior* “exterior teacher.” Therefore, the spiritual teacher (Christ) is effective at work both in the preacher/teacher to influence the listener/student (Kvicalova, 2019, p. 100). By implication Augustine introduced the essential pedagogical role of the Holy Spirit (Spirit of Christ) in teaching profession.

Guidelines for Teaching. Augustine’s first guidelines for catechetical learning was his letter, “On the

Instruction of Beginners” or “On Catechizing/Teaching the uninstructed”—*De Catechizandis Rudibus*. He focused on the challenges that the teacher encounters as well as the methods used. He recommended varying teaching methods depending upon the student’s abilities while concentrating on vital biblical passages as part of the teaching corpus (Blevins, 2015, vol. 1, p. 99).

His second group of guidelines was seen in his letter *On Christian Teaching*, which dealt with the comprehensive treatment of Christian beliefs and biblical interpretations based on theological guidelines. He integrated a treatment on the acquisition of knowledge through hermeneutical principles. He provided a theology of rhetoric for teaching bishops, using what he called “to teach, to delight, to sway” (Augustine, 2014, p. 98). He went on to explain this by saying, “teaching your audience is a matter of necessity, delighting them a matter of being agreeable, swaying them a matter of victory” (Heille, 2015, p. 6).

The first principle, “teaching” is of major necessity and found in the things the teacher “says;” the other two principles (delight and sway) are integrated in the “way” the teacher says things. Therefore, “to teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.” (Kerber, 2011, p. 79). The three principal goals (teach, delight, sway) must be integrated by the Christian teacher; what to say is as important as how to say it and the way you say it.

Embodied Education. Augustine modeled the role of the pastor as a teacher. In his teaching, Augustine employed three methods: the first involved those entering the faith and required a longer instructional effort; the second method was instruction with a catechism at Lent before baptism; and the third method involved, “mystagogy, or teaching about the realities of the sacraments and other church matters following baptism” (Blevins, 2015, vol. 1, p. 100). Augustine’s contribution in the field of education constituted a well-developed approach to Christian education (Hart, 2006, p. 36). It also provides a window into church “efforts to inspire, educate, and form the faithful into the Christian life” (Blevins, 2015, vol. 1, p. 101).

His contribution can be summarized as follows: first, “motivation of learning,” where Augustine perceived “education within the context of personal relationship between God and man” (Hart, 2006, p. 36). God, being, the author of truth and man as the recipient of that truth. CE must be viewed as understanding the nature of God. Learning must be built on real experience and motivated by love. CE must stimulate in the student the desire to learn and to develop faith that such information really exists.

The teacher must believe what they teach. A caring and loving teacher kindle a deep desire for students to learn. Student’s learning is revived by a caring and loving teacher. Teacher’s love for his student is an excellent pedagogy then as it is now. His emphasis on love is worthy to mention, “the

same medicine is not to be given to all, although to all the same love is due—to some love is gentle, to others severe, an enemy to none, a mother to all” (Hart, 2006, p. 36).

The second element that Augustine stressed was “effective communication.” The teacher and student share in the learning process. The student is his own teacher in that he participates by his own free will. The teacher was referred to as the “exterior teacher.” However, the “interior teacher” is the “Word of God” or “Christ.”

The third issue that Augustine highlighted was the “content of Christian curriculum.” He incorporated liberal arts in a Christian theory of knowledge. He considered these branches of studies as indispensable bases for all knowledge (Harrison, 2005, pp. 44-78). Liberal arts and CE go hand in hand. Both, if handled wisely, lead the learner to God as the source of all existence and all truth.

Pope Leo the Great (AD 395-461)

Pope Leo the Great was born in AD 395 and became a bishop in about AD 411 (Hillerbrand, 2012, p. 337). Leo the Great became pope AD 449. He was most likely of Tuscan origin, although he calls himself a Roman. He was the first pope who did not die a martyr’s death (Jurgens, 1979, vol. 3, p. 268). He was distinguished for his eloquent sermons and respectable rhetorical education.

Pope Leo was a promoter of learning in *general* and of CE in *particular*; CE should embrace various disciplines such as rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, and above all the Bible. His “great exertions in favor of the higher education of the clergy in all lines should be proof enough that the strong light of science is not feared; in other words, the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century, as through all the preceding centuries, is the promoter of learning in all its branches” (Warren, 1895, p. 204). His emphasis on CE stressed the fact that if someone is called to the ministry, he must first go to school.

Pope Gregory the Great (AD 540-604)

Gregory the Great (Magnus) was born in AD 540 to an aristocratic and wealthy Roman family. He became patriarch in Rome from 2 September 590 until he died in AD 604 (Beament & Campion, 2020, p. 33). He is best known for his writings, which surpassed his predecessors. Because of his many dialogues, he is also called the “Fourth Doctor,”^{vi} and the “Gregory of Dialogues.” (Johnson, 2009, pp. 115-128; see also Gregory 1959, p. 186). He was one of the most distinguished Latin Fathers.

Gregory the Great displayed a great aptitude for classical and religious learning. In his *Regula Pastoralis*, “Pastoral Rule,” or “Pastoral Care,” he underscored the importance of “Christian learning based on the Scriptures as a repository for models of charitable and uncharitable conduct” (Hintz, 2014, p. 43; see also, Gregory 1978, pp. 20-200). In that same book, he stressed the task of “Christian education in

preparing the learner for [the] Last Judgment” (Hintz, 2014, p. 43). Apart from being theoretical, Gregory the Great stressed the practical side of CE. He stressed home training as the commencing point of moral understanding (Sharma, 1997, p. 48).

Gregory showed great concern for the education of the poor clergy. He even encouraged “bishops to open schools for young men wanting to become priests.” (Koch, 1994, p. 118). Later, he expected the priests to open church school for children, where the Bible and the tradition of the church fathers could be taught. He enhanced church and monastery schools to focus on CE for the laity. The monastic school reached its apogee during his time; hence the title, “the Great Educator.” Gregory was strong on pastoral ministry, in which he underlined the fact that “pastoral care” is not a technical issue or moral stature; it is a theological activity (Beeley, 2008, p. 238).

Gregory defined the nature of “pastoral care” as the activity of a “caring pastor/teacher or a priest,” and the Holy Trinity administers the role each plays. In this discourse, Gregory described “pastoral care” as a ministry that stands between Christ’s first and Second Advent. To him, “pastoral care” was the direct consequence as well as the intended goal of the saving act of God in the history of humanity. The salvation that the believer gets from Christ must be extended practically to the whole of humanity.

Because of his love for mission and education, Gregory the Great sent missionaries to England to establish churches and Catechetical schools. The Bible was approached in faith and in line with the tradition of the church. According to many historians, Gregory the Great was “the first missionary pope” (Stroope, 2017, p. 34).^{viii} He sent out about thirty monks, among them Augustine (Canterbury). Gregory the Great “instructed the missionaries not to destroy pagan shrines or forbid pagan festivals,” but rather, “the missionaries were to redirect all pagan practices toward Christ” (Patella, 2012, p. 158). Such a tremendous effort could only be achieved through education.

Another contribution Gregory made to CE was to reform music in most religious houses where it had become extremely elaborate. As a result of his influence, music returned to a simpler mode. He also introduced a dialogue kind of music, especially at Easter, with the question “Whom do you Seek?” This piece was the most influential (Muir, 2003, p. 13). The dictum of Gregory in CE was “Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God” (Potterrie, 2008, p. 38).

Today, almost every school of religion/theology—regardless of its denominational and theological biases—offers a class on “pastoral care” to its trainees—Seventh-day Adventists are included. His work on “pastoral care” became the fountainhead of pastoral reflection in both Eastern and Western Christendom.

Isidore of Seville (AD 560-636)

Isidore of Seville was born in AD 560 either in Cartagena or in Seville. He was the last of the “Latin Fathers.” He was the youngest of four children. His father was of Hispano-Roman origin, while his mother was of a Visigothic origin (Isidorus, 2008, p. 1-3). He was known as the man of few words. His parents died when he was still young. He grew up and was educated in Seville under the care of his older brother, Leander, most likely in the monastery school. He became a prolific writer and a gifted administrator. After the death of his brother, Isidore became the bishop of Seville in about AD 600 (Isidore, 2006, pp. 7-10). He was well-versed in many areas of learning, such as astrology, mathematics, geometry, music, and obviously the Bible.

Isidore’s emphasis on CE was quite remarkable in carrying out his mission as a religious teacher and leader of his time. Isidore aimed to educate the clergy of his time (Barrett, 2020, p. 43). As he began to embark upon this mission, he often said his famous statement, “how can one teach what one has not learned?” According to him, “ignorance is sin” and “ignorance nourishes vices and is the mother of all errors” (Rengers, 2014, p. 45). His focus on education was extraordinary; he prioritized the study of the Bible.

Isidore’s work on *Etymologies* contained seven liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, logic, medicine, zoology, the mechanical arts, and metallurgy) and their usefulness in advancing the cause of divine learning (Sharma, 1997, p. 62). To Isidore, the seven liberal arts must be integrated into CE and he sought to do this by the end of the seventh century AD. The seven liberal arts were considered “the basis for Christian education.” (Grant, 1999, p. 15).

In *Synonyma*, Isidore developed the methods used to determine the instructional content (Isidore, 2009, pp. 5-10). His stress on CE influenced the Church’s program of seminary training and the establishment of curriculum (Getz, 1995, pp. 83-84). He was gifted in the organizational structures of educational subjects (known today as an “academic bulletin”) and almost every school during his time had to embrace his curriculum (Rengers, 2014, p. 45). Their learning curriculum focused on the Scripture, hymns, and liturgical books. He also emphasized that repetition facilitates good learning and aids the memorization of the lessons learned.

He encouraged parents to send their children to the monasteries where they could learn under the influence of monk-pedagogues. During his time the “cathedral school achieved even greater prestige” in educational attainment (Ellis, 2009, p. 8). He endorsed physical exercise upon every student in order for them to live a healthy life. Isidore said, “a man’s physique (*apta et virilis figura*), physical toughness (*duritia corporis*), powerful arms (*robur lacertorum*), and all-around manliness (*virtus*)” are part of education (Goldberg,

2020, p. 28). Physical exercise is as important as spiritual growth. Both are inseparable in CE. During his time Christian education was taken to the countryside, where it would enhance the learning experience of the monk or the priest, and eventually the student.

When students made mistakes in class, he insisted that they must be chastised with physical punishment, yet within limits (Maldonado, 2020, p. 312). The teacher was responsible for disciplining and developing the moral aspect of the student (Gordon & Lawton, 2019, p. 35). In his teaching philosophy he highlighted the prominence of avoiding disputes or argumentations, for it can lead to heresy and contentiousness.

He taught that philosophy must be integrated into the teaching of Bible. His definition on philosophy was “the science of all things divine and human,” and by science he included theology and religion (Moran, 2004, p. 127). He was hospitable in accommodating other branches of knowledge in his philosophy of education. As an educator, he was the forerunner of positive and progressive thinking in educational circles. His thoughts on CE surpassed his people and time.

Indeed, it was in the area of education that Isidore made his greatest contribution, earning him the title “Schoolmaster of the Middle Ages” (Guiley, 2001, p. 159). He was systematic in his work and without a doubt ahead of his time. He also believed that everything in educational institutions must be written down for clarity and reliability.

The priest or the monk must be distinguished both by his learning and sanctity, he would say. In educating the clergy, he emphasized two types of prayer: one offered internally (private prayer) and other in groups. He also believed in practical education, where the priest or the monk could work while studying and admonished them further to “sing while working to alleviate fatigue” (Maldonado, 2020, p. 312). Developing a healthy mind in a healthy body was the focus. He had the philosophy of “physical education,” or “work education” as we call it today.

Isidore’s main concern was to develop the spiritual life of monks (Maldonado, 2020, p. 302). The duty of the clergy was to study the Canon and the Scriptures (Isidore, 2018, p. 3.35). In his philosophy of education, Isidore did not have a minimal requirement for entering the monastic type of school but he believed in qualifying all. He also focused on the spiritual life of the “family,” and it was him who said:

Prayer purifies us, reading instructs us. Both are good when both are possible. Otherwise, prayer is better than reading. If a man wants to be always in God’s company, he must pray regularly and read regularly. When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us. All spiritual growth comes from reading and reflection. By reading we learn what we did not know; by reflection we retain what we have learned. Reading the holy Scriptures confers two benefits. It trains the mind to understand

them; it turns man’s attention from the follies of the world and leads him to love God. . . . Learning unsupported by grace may get into our ears; it never reaches the heart. It makes a great noise outside but serves no inner purpose. But when God’s grace touches our innermost minds to bring understanding, his word which has been received by the ear sinks deep into the heart. (Isidore, 1976, p. 3; see also Walsh, 2012, p. 65).

It suffices to say that Isidore’s focus on CE was extraordinary. Many times teaching focuses on stuffing the student’s mind with information and forgetting the sole purpose of why CE exists: prayer and reflection. Vertical (man-God) relationship comes before the horizontal (man-man). This is very relevant to us today, especially in the digital age. In CE, we need to point and fashion the minds of the students towards God for solace and support. Isidore’s philosophy of CE was holistic. He trained the head, the heart, the hands, and the habit.

II. SYRIAC FATHERS

About four of the “Church Fathers” wrote in Syriac, hence the name, “Syriac Fathers.” They were knowledgeable about Church tradition; their theology was developed along with Greek-Byzantine thought and was spread in the regions of Syria-Palestine. They made significant contributions to the church in many areas of learning. This section focuses on their contributions to CE.

Aphrahat of Adiabene (AD 270-345)

The first of the “Syrian Fathers” was Aphrahat of Adiabene, who was born about AD 270. He lived at the monastery of Mar Mattai, northern Iraq, near Mosul. He was a son of noble Persian parents. It should be noted at this point that “Aphrahat” is not actually a name, “it comes from the Farsi (i.e., Persian) word ‘farad’, which means literally ‘sage.’” (Bar Israël, 2014, p. 56). His name is “the Syriac version of the Persian name *Frahāt*.” (Lizorkin, 2010, vol. 2, p. 180).^{viii}

Upon his conversion to Christianity he was called “Jacob bishop of Mar Mattai” (Fromm, 2010, p. 17). He was a Syriac Christian author and was commonly referred to as “The Persian Sage.” He wrote during the “great persecution” that arose between the Romans and the Persians (Younan, 2009, pp. 72-73).

His writings prove him to be an educated individual capable of independent thinking (Neusner, 1971, p. xi). He used to immerse himself in the study of the Bible. As a teacher, he spoke from his own personal experiences and never quoted his tutors (Koltun, 1993, p. 24). One thing that most scholars agree on is that he was a deep thinker, a well-educated man, a writer, and had a vast knowledge of the Scriptures. As a teacher, he was a master of the tradition of the Church, biblical text, shepherd of the flock, and a defender of its reputation.

Aphrahat wrote about 23 *Demonstrations* over an eight-year period.^x His audience was mainly Christians in order to enable them to cope with criticism from the Jewish community (Lizorkin, 2019, p. 7). He was careful to understand the nature of his opponents' criticism of Christianity (Jarkins, 2003, p. 3). He used the Syriac Bible, *Peshitta*, to defend his faith against Judaism, although he was not an anti-Judean person *per se*. In his writings, he demonstrated the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. His emphasis on defending the faith is seen as a contribution to CE. Likewise, CE helps one to contend with various criticisms and grounds in the faith. CE should help the student to be theologically minded in every aspect of life.

Ephrem the Syrian (AD 306-373)

Ephrem the Syrian was born in about AD 306 at Nisibis in Mardin Province, Turkey. Most likely, he was of Christian parents. He was a student of James, Bishop of Nisibis (Jurgens, 1979, vol. 1, p. 309). He was a contemporary of Aphrahat. He is considered the most well-known and revered person in all Christendom. Because of his influential development of music, he was called *Mar Afrem*, "the Great Prophet of Syrians" (Dixon, 2013, p. 146)^x or "the Harp of the Holy Spirit." (Chardon, 2006, p. 317; see also Mathews, Jr., 2006, p. 161). He was ordained to the diaconate at Edessa, modern Urfa, south-east Turkey. He was a gifted preacher and teacher of his time. He was known to be a "lyricist in his preaching; he could sing and draw with his words" (Kandráč, 2013, p. 44).

He authored many homilies, poems, and hymns, and "through his hymnography, he fought against the Gnostic heresies of Vardesan and Armon and attended personally the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea" in AD 325 (Kandráč, 2013, p. 44). Hymnography (based on Psalms, Old and New Testaments, "eighty-seven Hymns on Faith"), is seen as one of his contributions to CE that reflected a profound manifestation for the expression of God's love. It connects the Bible to music. He was an influential "educator and defender of Nicene Orthodoxy, even setting his theological hymns to the music of the Syrian folk tunes." (Cone & Rea, 2019, p. 111). He helped strengthen the hymnography in the catechetical schools.

Another contribution to CE was the establishment of the Syrian school in AD 363, which focused on exegesis, apologetics, preaching, and ascetical studies (Daly, 2019, p. 99). It was located at Edessa and was called the "School of the Persians." We can justifiably envision "Ephrem teaching exegesis in the Christian school at Nisibis" (Murray, 2006, p. 336). The school was a great center of learning, which focused on biblical exegesis. It also taught polemic to its students enabling them to defend their faith against Gnosticism and heretics. Ephrem did not hesitate to revive liturgical music at Edessa, where hymns "became a means to educate and correct the flock entrusted to him" (Dunkle, 2016, p. 30).

The school played an equal role in translating the Greek literature into Syriac. The works of many great scholars were translated into Syriac to aid holistic learning for its students.^{xi} Many other Greek works, "theological as well as philosophical, historical, geographical and astronomical, were translated into Syriac and functioned in the curriculum of the school" (Drijvers, 1995, p. 51). The school at Edessa became the Persian focal point of theological instruction for Christians coming from the east (Thomas, 2015, p. 33). The school initially focused on reading the Psalter; later, it progressed to make the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) as part of its daily reading and studies. To Ephrem, education was salvific in nature.

Isaac of Antioch (AD 451-452)

Isaac of Antioch was born in AD 451 who was a native of Amida. He is the third of the "Syriac Fathers" and commonly called the "Great of Antioch." He was the author of many metrical homilies and hymns (Cheyne, 2008, p. 29). Isaac was a defender of the beliefs of the Syriac church (Bardenheuer, 2008, p. 396).

Isaac's contribution to CE was limited; one line of thought regarding typologies comes into view. For instance, he taught that the calling of the "Gentiles forms, with the person of Christ and the Cross, one of the three main themes of typological exegesis" (Murray, 2006, p. 42).^{xiii} As an apologist, he saw that the type and the antitype had met in Christ's death and defended such a view as part of CE. The goal of apologetics is to strengthen the faith of the believers and at the same time to challenge the worldview of the unbelievers. He wrote about eighty-two homilies (passion, resurrection, ascension, nativity, and Christology), some defended doctrinal issues while others supported the faith (Forness, 2018, pp. 168-169). For him, the Bible was the foundation of one's faith enabling a defence of the faith.

Isaac of Nineveh (AD 613-700)

Isaac of Nineveh was the last of the "Syriac Fathers," born about AD 613 in Beth Qatraye, modern day Kurdistan. Isaac of Nineveh, was known also as Isaac the Syrian. He was ordained as a bishop of Nineveh around AD 676. He was a writer, a monk, and an ascetic person, whose writings have influenced Coptic Orthodox monasticism. Late in his life, he composed *Ascetical Homilies* in about AD 688 (Scully, 2017, p. xiii). His writings on "ascetic subjects survive in the form of numerous homilies" (Louth & Conti, 2014, vol. 1, p. 193). He became blind at an old age, and because of that, he was called a "second Didymos." (Alfeyev, 2013, p. 666).

His writings have been used in the catechetical school at the Coptic monasteries, whose chief concern was bringing people to Christ (Marique, 2008, vol. 1, p. 48). He lived under the Muslim rule and his writings were aimed against the iconoclasm of the faith of the Syriac Christians. His *Ascetical Homilies* influenced the theological training of the Coptic Christians and were viewed as a great source in

enhancing CE. The aim of the monasteries at that time supported the “preaching ministry and the religious education of the clergy and the laity” (Meinardus, 1999, p. 93).

Isaac of Nineveh’s main concern for the Christian in *general*, and the religion teacher in *particular*, was to achieve purify within by daily communion with God, which was more important to him than doing good deeds. Achieving spiritual health within was necessary before it was possible to minister to others (Alfeyev, 2016, pp. 45-49). According to him, CE should inspire the learner to emphasize not the “words” but the “deeds” of the person. To him, “deeds” speak louder than “words.” CE first and foremost should enables the student to think theologically in every sphere of life.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Both the Latin and Syriac Fathers emphasized the role of the Bible in Christian education. Commencing with Tertullian, the scriptures were integrated into teaching materials and listeners were challenged to accept Jesus who can transform lives. The purpose of education was to prepare students for baptism according to Hippolytus of Rome, but this was held as a joint responsibility of the church, community, and associated society of believers. The emphasis on introducing learners to the plan of salvation was continued by various Latin Fathers including Gregory the Great.

The necessity of Christian instructors to reflect the character of Christ was emphasized by Cyprian of Carthage and Ambrose of Milan, which is relevant to the instructor today who should focus on behavioral standards and their systematic application in the school setting and beyond.

The formulation of arguments in defence of theological beliefs was encouraged by Hilary of Poitiers. The Bible formed the foundation underpinning a sound defense. This objective was facilitated by Pope Damasus I who arranged for Jerome, his secretary, to produce the *Vulgate* translation. This functioned to promote Christian education in a language more readily understandable and it facilitated a deeper understanding of the Bible’s treasures. It made a great contribution in educating various classes of people revealing the beauty and uplifting nature of Word of God and indicated that it contained clear moral guidelines.

Augustine of Hippo was innovative in that he developed guidelines for effective teaching. The promotion of music as a core activity in education was introduced by Ambrose of Milan. Later, Pope Gregory the Great made significant reforms to religious music, which was marked by simplicity and adherence to biblical principles.

Pope Leo the Great advised teachers to embrace various branches of learning and not forget to include the Holy Bible as the basis of establishing a firm foundation in all disciplines. This instruction was facilitated by the prior establishment of a Christian library by Pope Damasus I. The last of the Latin Fathers was Isidore of Seville who made

exceptional contributions to CE. He was the first to develop an academic bulletin. In his view, educational institutions should be housed outside of the city zone, where active learning can take place. According to him, CE should not cultivate argumentation and disputes. Discipline should be part of any educational system, especially when students make mistakes. His philosophy of education was holistic and ahead of his time.

Like Jerome, the teacher in the 21st-century should make use the available devices and technology to integrate faith and learning in CE so as to give clarity. Making Christ the center of teaching will prove effective to the seeker. To make the greatest impact, the teacher should be flexible to change the teaching strategy to suit the needs of the students. Above all, scriptural and secular knowledge must be threaded together to develop their faith in Jesus.

Adopting Augustine’s principal teaching goals (teach, delight, sway) would help the 21st-century Christian teachers to unveil Jesus in an attractive way in the classroom. The educator today is challenged to inspire and educate their hearers to daily invite God into their lives so that their characters may develop (sanctification process) to be like that of their Maker. Love, it was held, is an indispensable ingredient for teachers to demonstrate in a practical manner.

A Christian teacher in the 21st-century can learn from Isidore of Seville and emulate one of the best strategies of teaching—repetition. College professors today are admonished to reveal Christ in their classrooms by avoiding disputes and argumentative ideas that make the future workers of the church arrogant. Christian institutions should focus on producing evangelists, pastors, teachers, and preachers who specialize in using a gentle and persuasive approach. In that way, Christ will be made known to those who do not know Him.

The primary contribution of the Syriac Fathers to CE was in the area of apologetics. The defence against objections was continued by Ephrem the Syrian who played a role in CE in that he authored hymnography to defend against the teachings of Gnosticism. He established the Syrian school in which the Bible was used as its main source of learning. His integration of the Bible and music was remarkable. The Syriac Fathers continued the tradition of the Latin Fathers to make the Bible central in teaching, for they realized that it provided a powerful weapon against various criticisms. The Syriac Fathers, and especially Isaac of Nineveh, continued to emphasize that “deeds” instruct more fully than “words.”

It suffices to say that the early Christians made a significant contribution to the global church’s doctrines, mission, and spirituality through theological treatises produced and through their efforts in the field of education. They understood that to be alive is to become not only *educated* but to become *religiously* educated.

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- vi. The other three doctors were: Jerome, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo.
- vii. He sent missionary to convert the Lombard, Visigothic Spain, Anglo-Saxon, England, and Italy to the Roman Catholic Church (For further information, see Hilja, 2010, pp. 27-30).
- viii. He probably had two names: Aphrahat as a given name, and Jacob the name he took at conversion. Having two names was a common cultural practice that existed in the Ancient Near East and still exists in the Middle East and the Syriac church. Information about Aphrahat seems to be very scant.
- ix. The Demonstrations (1-23) are written alphabetically in which Aphrahat used the Syriac alphabet. He refers to sermons and letters. The first ten Demonstrations are believed to have been written in AD 337, and dealt with Pastors, Humility, Resurrection of the Dead, Faith, Love, Fasting, The Children of the Covenant, Wars, and Prayer. Demonstrations 11-22, have been dated about AD 344 and dealt with the Jewish practices; such as "Circumcision, Passover, Sabbath, An Exhortation to the Bishops and Faithful of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Distinction between Foods, the People and Peoples, Christ the Son of God, Virginity and Continenace, Against the Gathering of the Jews, Support of the Needy, On Persecutions, Death and the Last Days." (Homan, 2018, vol. 1, p. 92). The 23rd item in the Demonstrations falls outside of the Syriac alphabet system, and dealt with symbolism "On the Grape Cluster," taken from Prophet Isaiah chapter 65 and elsewhere as its cue. For further information, (see Childers, 2009, p. 28).
- x. One of his most quoted metaphor about God is "This also is thou; neither is this thou." (Quoted by Jacobs, 2019, p. 134).
- xi. Works such as the Antiochene theologian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Aristotle, and many biblical interpreters.
- xii. The calling of the Gentiles to replace ancient Israel is the first of the typologies. The second is the person of Jesus Christ, and the third is the Cross

FOOTNOTE

- i. Cyprian's Book III of Ad Quirinum "is a collection of Old and New Testament passages on Christian moral duties. Cyprian here has made an original collection on a traditional theme of Christian teaching." (Ferguson, 2014, p. 15).
- ii. Martin Luther (AD 1483-1546) appealed to Hilary's teaching when he said, "It is certainly true that one should teach nothing outside of Scripture pertaining to divine matters, as St. Hilary writes in On the Trinity, Book I, which means only that one should teach nothing that is at variance with Scripture—this cannot be adhered to, especially in a controversy and when heretics want to falsify things with trickery and distort the words of Scripture." (Luther, 2020, p. 83).
- iii. The apostle Matthew writes, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18 NKJV).
- iv. An inscribed stone has been found that reads: "I have erected this structure for the archives of the Roman Church; I have surrounded it with porticos on either side; and I have given it my name which I hope will be remembered for centuries." (Harris, 1999, p. 96).
- v. For instance, whenever I teach Basic and Intermediate Biblical Hebrew language to Theology majors, the first thing I do is cut out in cardboard the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, color it, pass it to each student to see and to touch every Hebrew letter. After this, I turn to explain the spiritual significance behind each Hebrew