The last half of the Fourth Century may well be called "The Golden Age of the Fathers." In the first part of this period (up to 381 A.D.) the leaders of the Church were waging some of the greatest battles for the truth that have ever been waged. In the latter part of the century the Church enjoyed the fruits of victory and one of the great periods of peace. In this time the church was blessed with some of the greatest leaders, some of the greatest preachers, with some of the greatest scholars and saints of church history. There have been few, if any, periods of similar length that could match it.

The Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople of 381 A.D., with its Nicence Creed, is one of the great landmarks of church history. The heresies threatening the truth had been condemned and the emperor, Theodosius, had been instructed to close heretical churches. Only those who held the truth were to exist. Before the century ended (392 A.D.) the emperor would order all pagans temples closed. Christianity was victorious.

Three men who stand out in the battle for the Nicene faith in the East were Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

ATHANASIUS:
Born about 295 and died in 373, before the council. He was only a deacon when he accompanied his bishop, Alexander, to the Council of Nicaea in 325. He became bishop in 328 when Alexander died. He was one of the principal targets of the Arians until his death. Five times he was sent into exile but the Arians could not destroy his faith. He was one of the greatest heroes of the men of the Golden Age. He left the church a rich heritage in his writings: Apology against the Arians, Apology to the Emperor Constantius, History of the Arians, The Incarnation of the Word, and The Life of Anthony.

BASIL OF CAESAREA:
He was the leader and the administrator among "the Great Cappadocians." He was the literary scholar. He studied in Caesarea, Constantinople, Athens, and with the most famous hermits of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. He lead in the battle against the Arians in Cappadocia. He was a powerful preacher. Very effectively he led the movement to rid the church of Arian bishops, replacing them with Nicenes. He prepared a new rule to guide the monasteries (The Rule of Basil). He left many sermons, a great work against the Arians entitled Against Eunomius, and an important work On the Holy Spirit.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS:
The greatest preacher among the Cappadocians. He had been a fellow student with Basil in Athens. With his father he drove the Arians from his home territory (Nazianzus). His preaching as bishop in Constantinople was the major factor in overthrowing the Arians in the capital. He presided at the opening of the Council in 381. When
he resigned as bishop and from the council he spent the rest of his life on the family estate in Nazianzus in monastic retirement, leaving the church a rich heritage in sermons, poems and letters. He died in 390.

Four men stood out in the battle for the Nicene faith in the West and were heroes for the men of the Golden Age. The four were Hosius of Cordova, Damasus of Rome, Martin of Tours, and Hilary of Poitiers.

HOSIUS OF CORDOVA:
Hosius was Constantine's adviser at the Council of Nicaea. He was probably the most influential man at the council and may have presided. He was quite old when he died in 357. He had suffered great persecution and indignities from the Arians. Constantius exiled him because he would not condemn Athanasius.

DAMASUS OF ROME:
He was bishop in Rome from 366 to 384. His predecessor, Liberius, had been exiled by Constantius. Damasus took a leading role in the defeat of Arianism in the West. He commissioned Jerome to prepare the Vulgate and gave Jerome great encouragement.

MARTIN OF TOURS:
From 370 to 397 he was the great missionary bishop in France. He made Tours a great center of missionary training. Tours became the mother monastery of French monasteries.

HILARY OF POITIERS
He has been called "The Athanasius of the West." Born of rich pagan parents he received a good education. He became a very zealous Christian about 345. He was made a priest and then became bishop when the Arians were reaching the height of their power. Constantius sent him into exile. He took a leading role in uniting the Homelousians and the Homoousians. He died about 368. He left a great work On the Trinity.

THE GREAT MEN OF THE GOLDEN AGE

These men belong to the two generations that followed the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. They were contemporaries and many of them knew one another and influenced one another. Each one was a striking individual in his own right. They were great and powerful personalities. By birth they belonged to the elite of society, some of them coming from the very highest families. They received first-rate educations that included literature, philosophy, history, classical rhetoric. They were skilled in oratory and their writings show mastery of language. They were born into Christian homes--at least one parent was a Christian and with some of them their families had been Christian for more than one generation. Many of them were teachers before they became priests or bishops. Most of them were strongly influenced by the ideals of monasticism with its emphasis on asceticism, spiritual living and perfection. They were men who knew the Scriptures.
GREGORY OF NYSSA

He was the youngest of the Great Cappadocians and the philosopher—as a philosopher and thinker probably second only to Origen in the Eastern Church. He was reared by his older sister, Macrina, who was one of the most saintly women of the ancient church. He was a teacher of rhetoric before he joined the other Cappadocians in the monastery. He spent about ten years in the monastery before his older brother, Basil, called him from the monastery to be bishop of Nyssa. He became one of the greatest preachers and orators of his time. In his earlier years he has been charged with being weak in administration but he matured into a "column of orthodoxy." He was even more powerful in his writings and the list of his works is long. He wrote against Arians and Apollinarians. Highly treasured are his Life of Moses and his Life of Saint Macrina.

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (313-386)

Cyril is thought to have been the author of the Nicene Creed that came out of the Council of Constantinople. He is noted for the program of instruction in the faith and for the beautiful liturgy he prepared for the church in Jerusalem. His most famous work is his Catecheses which contains his exposition of the faith and worship of the church.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND (313-398)

Although blinded at the age of four, by diligent application he became one of the greatest scholars and teachers of his age—a master in philosophy, theology, dialectical sciences, geometry, astronomy, and arithemetic. Athanasius appointed him head of the catechetical school in Alexandria—he was the last head of the school, holding this position for fifty years. He was a devoted Origenist. Jerome and Rufinus were his most noted pupils. His works On the Trinity and On the Holy Spirit were among the ablest of the time.

MARCARIUS OF EGYPT (300-390) and EVAGRIUS THE PONTIC (346-399)

One of the most saintly of the monks of Egypt was Macarius. He was ordained a priest c. 340 and became a noted preacher and writer. He retired to a community of monks in upper Egypt where his fame as preacher, teacher, saint and miracle worker grew.

Evagarius the Pontic was ordained a deacon by Gregory of Nazianzus and became a noted preacher in Constantinople. In 382 he went to the Egyptian desert and became the pupil of Macarius. He wrote commentaries on Psalms and Proverbs and manuals to guide the monks in their quest for spirituality.

CASSIAN (360-435)

A man just coming into most productive years at the end of the fourth century. Of undetermined origin he received an excellent education. He then went to study with the monks in Egypt. After several years with the most famous teachers in Egypt he was ordained a deacon by John Chrysostom in Constantinople in 400. In 405 he went to Rome with a letter from the clergy of Constantinople making an appeal to Pope Innocent I for the exiled Chrysostom. In 410 he founded the Abbey of St. Victor in Marseilles. He took an active part in Sin-Grace controversy and also wrote against Nestorius on Christology. His most famous works were ascetic treatises:
The Institutiones, a guide book for monks, and his The Conferences, the story of his studies with the most famous solitaries of Egypt. He did much to spread monasticism in the West.

GELASIUS OF CAESAREA (died 395)

A nephew of Cyril of Jerusalem and successor of Eusebius once removed (Acacius, died 366, immediate successor of Eusebius) wrote a continuation of the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius.

SULPICIUS SEVERUS (360-425)

A lawyer from a distinguished family in Aquitania. On the death of his wife he entered the monastery at Tours and became a devoted disciple of St. Martin of Tours. His Chronicles give a sacred history from creation down to 400 A.D. His most treasured work was his Life of Saint Martin.

TELEMACHUS

A monk who brought an end to the gladiatorial shows by his own death. In Rome on January 1, 391 the monk rushed between the combatants in the arena. The crowd went wild and called for him to be cut to pieces. A sense of shame and revulsion set in that moved the Emperor Honorius to abolish the games.

EPIPHANTUS (315-403)

A native of Palestine who founded and directed a monastery in Palestine about 335. Acquired a great reputation for saintliness, learning, and orthodoxy. He is reputed to have learned Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Coptic, and Latin. In 367 he was invited by the bishops to become Metropolitan of the churches in Cyprus. He is credited with driving all heretics from the island and making the church a model of orthodoxy and saintliness. About 374 he wrote his Ancoratus (The Firmly-Anchored Man) against the Pneumatophobes (Arian heretics on the Holy Spirit). In 377 he completed his Panarion (Medicine Chest) in which he refuted the eighty heresies that had appeared in the church to his time. His studies convinced him that Origen was the source of heresies by leaving questions undecided. He began a tour to arouse the churches against Origen. Sermons in Jerusalem and, Bethlehem converted Jerome who was living and studying in a monastery in Bethlehem and aroused the hostility of Bishop John of Jerusalem and of Rufinus of Aquileia. He also joined Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria in a campaign against John Chrysostom, bishop in Constantinople.

JEROME (342-420)

One of the greatest scholars of the Golden Age and the writer with the finest literary style. Born to a wealthy family at Stridon on the borders of Pannonia and Dalmatia. At the age of twelve he was sent to Rome to study grammar under Donatus, the most celebrated schoolmaster of the age. At sixteen he began his literature. He was baptized by Pope Liberius about 365. He went to Trier where he got interested in theology and decided to be a monk. From 368-374 he studied in Aquileia where he became a close friend of Rufinus. About 374 he visited Greece, Thracia, Asia Minor and settled in Antioch with Paulinus about 378. He studied with Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople in 379. He returned to Rome where he became the secretary of Pope Damasus (382-385). They collaborated on trying to establish an official Latin text to put an end to the variety of
texts in circulation. He preached monastic asceticism with such fervor he aroused bitter opposition. He organized a study circle in the home of Marcella and her mother, Albina, and the virgin Asella. Also in the group were Paula and her two daughters. When two of the circle died and the populace blamed it on the rigors imposed by Jerome he left Rome for Palestine (385). For thirty five years he lived, studied and taught in a monastery in Bethlehem of which he became abbot. He became an admirer of Origen and translated many of his works with extravagant introductions. About 392-3 Epiphanius turned him against Origen and he wrote bitter attacks on Origen. This led to his bitter clash with Bishop John of Jerusalem and his old friend, Rufinus. Jerome was a cantankerous person who was in a big fight most of his life. In Rome in 383 he was in a bitter clash with Helvidius over the perpetual virginity of Mary. About 393 he was engaged in a quarrel with Jovinian over the relative merits of virginity and marriage. Jovinian denied that celibacy and virginity would bring greater rewards in heaven. About 404 he got into a controversy with Vigilantius over the cult of saints and martyrs. About 415 he attacked Pelagius and sided with Augustine in the controversy over total depravity and predestination. Jerome wrote commentaries on many of the books of Scripture: Psalms, Ecclesiastes, the prophets, Matthew, Paul's epistles, and the Apocalypse. One of his most treasured works was his history of Christian literature called Of Illustrious Men. His most famous work was his Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate. He started this task with Damasus in Rome in 384. He took it up again in Bethlehem in 390 and completed the project about 405. While working on the Old Testament he took lessons in Hebrew and Aramaic with the rabbis.

RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA (345-411)

Born to Christian parents in Aquileia and recieved a sound classical education, in Aquileia and in Rome. Became a monk and close friend of Jerome. He went to Egypt about 374 where he studied with Didymus the Blind and became a great admirer of Origen. He went to Palestine in 374 and founded a monastery. About 390 he was ordained by John of Jerusalem. When Epiphanius and Jerome began their attack on Origen Rufinus stoutly defended Origen. His exchange of letters with Jerome is one of the most bitter in Christian literature. About 397 Rufinus returned to Italy. He spent the greater part of the remainder of his life translating the Greek Fathers into Latin for the West. He translated Origen's the Greek First Principles and many of his commentaries. He translated portions of the Great Cappadocians. He translated Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, adding two chapters to bring the history down to his own day. He wrote a very important commentary on The Apostles Creed.