The years between the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. and the beginning of the fifth century (400 A.D.) may be spoken of as the Golden Age of the Fathers. The true faith had been approved and established by the council and the heresies had been condemned. A period of comparative peace followed, marked by rich blessings that were taken as the gracious favor of God. The church was a victorious church. In this period appeared some of the greatest preachers, scholars, and saints of church history. Few similar periods have produced so many great men. Antioch produced its share of these great men. From Antioch came Diodore of Tarsus, the great teacher, John Chrysostom, the preacher, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the great commentator on Scripture. Ambrose of Milan was to the West what John Chrysostom was to the East—its greatest preacher, but Ambrose was equally great as teacher of rhetoric, administrator, and Christian statesman. As an administrator he was far more successful than John Chrysostom.

**DIODORE OF TARSUS (330-392)**

Diodore was a native of Antioch who later became bishop of Tarsus. He received his theological training in the school of Antioch under Silvanus, who later became bishop of Tarsus, and under Eusebius of Emesa. He studied rhetoric and the classics in Athens. He founded and directed for ten years a monastery in Antioch that became a noted center of religious studies. His most illustrious pupils were John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. He developed the exegetical principles that characterized the school of Antioch in this period. He opposed Alexandrian allegory, advocating a more rational and historical literal exegesis that aimed at the original intention of the author and at bringing out the real sense of figurative expressions, symbols and prophecies. He called his method "Theory" by which he meant a search for the spiritual sense in the letter of the Bible. From the facts he sought to draw out the moral teachings they contained. He is reputed to have been the first in Antioch to write commentaries on the whole Bible.

Diodore stoutly opposed Julian the Apostate, earning his anger and insults. Julian accused him of having equipped his evil tongue against the ancient gods with the wisdom of Athens herself. He accused him of being the defender of the religion of farmers and a priest sorcerer of the Galileans. Julian mockingly declared that Diodore's pale face, gaunt figure and poor health were evidences of the anger of the gods.

The emperor, Valens, banished Diodore to Armenia. On his return to Antioch he was appointed bishop of Tarsus. He took an active part in the Council of Constantinople in 381. The emperor, Theodosius, designated him one of the bishops with whom communion would be considered as a proof of orthodoxy. About fifty years after his death, although during his life he had been considered a pillar of sound doctrine, questions began to be raised about his soundness, and he was accused of being one of the sources of Nestorian heresy on Christology.

**JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347-407)**

John who was later given the epithet, Chrysostom (the golden mouthed one), is considered the greatest pulpit orator the church has produced. He was born in Antioch to a wealthy officer of high rank in the Roman Army. The father, Secundus, died when he was a small child. Anthusa, left a widow at the age of twenty, completely devoted herself to John and his older sister. The sister died before she was grown. In profligate Antioch the young mother, Anthusa, resisted all suitors, governed her turbulent slaves, successfully stood up to greedy tax collectors, and wisely cared for the inheritance left her young son. She took pride in giving him the best education available without diminishing the estate. She gave the greatest care to his training in Christianity. Anthusa is well remembered as one of the great women in the ancient church.
John studied oratory, rhetoric and the classics under Libanius, the most famous teacher of his day, the greatest of the Pagan orators, the most distinguished sophist, and one of the most noted professors of law. John was Libanius’ most brilliant pupil. Libanius, wealthy, vain, proud, and who considered himself irresistible and who boasted of his conquests, was attracted by the intelligence, the beauty, and the wealth of Anthusa. She repeatedly refused his proposals until he cried, "Heavens, what women these Christians have!" When he was asked on his deathbed who was most worthy to succeed him, Libanius replied, "John, if the Christians had not stolen him from us."

John studied philosophy under Andragothias.

John successfully practised law for a time. His eloquence opened the prospect of great worldly success and front rank in public distinction. John did not neglect religious duties but he was not baptized.

With a friend, Basil, he began to study theology and Scripture under Diodore. Both of the young men decided to become monks. Anthusa took John by the hand and led him to the room where he had been born. Sitting by her bed she told him the story of how she had put her whole life into his rearing. She pictured the hard lot of the widow in a wicked world. She begged him not to become a monk, leaving her alone. She promised him full opportunity for retirement and contemplation in their home. John promised not to leave her. He and Basil, under the guidance of Diodore, practised all the austerities of the monks in his own home. They were joined by another student of Diodore, Theodore of Mopsuestia.

Theodore of Mopsuestia fell in love with a young lady, Hermoine, and announced that he was giving up his plans to be a monk and that he was going to marry. John wrote him two impassioned letters begging him not to desert the Lord, picturing the vanity of life and the dangers of turning back after putting the hand to the plough. Theodore was persuaded to give up his plans for marriage. John had saved him for theology and Scripture. Theodore would become bishop of Mopsuestia and the greatest exagete of the school of Antioch. He wrote commentaries on the whole of Scripture.

About 370 John was baptized by Bishop Meletius and a little later made a reader in the church.

When Bishop Meletius of Antioch was exiled for a third time in A.D. 370 by Emperor Valens, Diodore bravely tried to fill the gap. The church desperately needed bishops. He planned to ordain John and Basil. John tricked Basil so that he was ordained a bishop but John hid, declaring Basil was well qualified but that he was unworthy.

When Anthusa died John at last entered the monastery of Diodore who appointed an aged monk, Syrus, his tutor and trainer. For four years he devoted himself to austerities, prayer, study of scripture, and meditation, following Pachomius’ rule for the community type of monasticism. At the end of the four years he withdrew to become a hermit type of monk. He practised such great austerities he permanently ruined his health. He had to return to Antioch.

In Antioch, at the age of thirty-five, about the year 381 A.D., Bishop Meletius ordained him a deacon. In his six years as a deacon John got a first hand knowledge of the sad lot of the poor and the diligence and compassion he put into this ministry won for him the undying love and gratitude of the humble folk. In this period he poured our his heart in his beautiful Letter to a Young Widow, his On Virginity, and his On the Martyr Babylas.

In 386 when he was about forty, Bishop Flavian ordained him a priest of the church in Antioch. Flavian was a better administrator than preacher. He recognized John’s talents and made him the preaching presbyter. Antioch was a notoriously wicked city of about 200,000 people--a mongrel population of Greeks, Orientals, Jews, Pagans and about 100,000 Christians. The church was exceedingly worldly and frivolous. They were careless about church attendance, some attending only on feast days, and many were irreverent and inattentive. They joined Jews and Pagans in the brutal circus and immoral shows. They followed many heathen customs and superstitiously followed magic and oracles. For twelve years as their preacher John boldly and faithfully called them to repentance and exhorted them to righteous and holy living. With powerful oratory he balanced fear and
love, rebuke and encouragement. No one better pictured the terrors of hell or the glories of heaven, the wrath of God and his boundless mercy. A contemporary described his preaching: "He spoke with his heart, but his head was brimful of things to speak about." Another said, "His words were embellished by his deeds." He preached once or twice a week, always preparing very carefully. His fame as a preacher grew until he was recognized as the first preacher of his age. When the emperor, Theodosius, levied a new heavy tax on Antioch angry mobs wrecked the public baths and wantonly destroyed statues of the emperor, his wife, and former emperors. They set fire to the city. A spirit of remorse and despair fell over the city. The emperor would severely punish the city. Bishop Flavian fled to the emperor to beg for mercy. For twenty-seven days John powerfully called the city to repentance. Great numbers were baptized. The emperor was moved to pardon the city. John powerfully preached against sin, on the vanity of this world, and the example of Jesus. The bishop Flavian gave him complete backing, enforcing a rigorous discipline. He withdrew fellowship from those who went on in sin. The moral climate of Antioch was changed and the church became something of a model church. The bishop and his preacher made a great team.

The eunuch, Eutropius, the chief minister of the emperor, Theodosius, heard John preach in Antioch. Although Eutropius was a man of low morals, mean and greedy, he insisted that the emperor call John to become bishop in Constantinople and preacher in the emperor's church.

Reluctantly in 398 John answered the call of the emperor. The emperor insisted that Theophilus of Alexandria consecrate John as bishop. Theophilus had tried to get one of his followers in Alexandria in as bishop and was bitter that one from Antioch was chosen. He hid his bitterness but was waiting for a chance to bring John down.

Constantinople wasfully as wicked as Antioch had been and perhaps even more wicked. The city was filled with political intrigue and the government full of greed and corruption. The church was filled with loud and angry quarrels. The Christians were given to gossip, slander, backbiting, and swearing. They joined the pagans in vicious and degrading amusements. They had adopted many pagan superstitions and practices. They shared with them a vulgar pride in wealth and a tasteless and senseless love of luxury and show. They were ignorant and indifferent to the study of Scripture, neglected church attendance and communion. Worship services were noisy and irreverent. John was shocked at the worldliness of the church.

John took his call very seriously. He prepared his sermons carefully and preached with great power. Without fear or favor he preached on sin, judgment, hell. He exalted the example of Jesus, the love of God, and the hope of heaven. He was uncompromising as a reformer. The people flocked to hear him. He won the love and loyalty of the masses but he also made bitter enemies. Nectarius, the bishop before him had been easy-going and loved luxury. He was noted for his great banquets attended by pagans and Christians. John began a program of great austerity. He insisted on fasting instead of banquets. He started with the clergy. All luxuries were abolished. He called for sacrificial giving to send missionaries to the pagans on the borders. He removed the immoral, worldly and lazy among the clergy. Some of the deposed became bitter enemies.
When John decided that the seat of sin was in high places among the rich and powerful he denounced them from the pulpit and called for repentance. John had to enforce his own discipline. He sorely missed Bishop Fabian who had handled discipline for him in Antioch. The list of his enemies grew. Some complained that he was morose, haughty, austere, inhospitable and withdrawn. He felt the storm gathering but he gave himself completely to his work. When he decided that the empress, Eudoxia, and the wealthy women around her were the real leaders in sin his pulpit rang with sermons against Jezebel and Herodias. These women became bitter enemies.

Some monks in Egypt, known as the Tall Brothers, got into difficulties with their bishop, Theophilus. He excommunicated them. They fled for refuge to Constantinople to John. John was convinced that the bishop had treated them unjustly. Theophilus was furious that John extended fellowship to them. He went to Constantinople and joined Eudoxia, her women, and some of the clergy in a plot to get rid of John. Secretly they called a quickie synod at suburban Oak in 403, drew up twenty-nine charges against John and declared him deposed as bishop and ordered him into exile. John did not fight back. He slipped into exile. Popular demonstrations forced the emperor to call John back to his pulpit to restore order in the city. The people welcomed him as a hero. But when he again preached against sin and called for repentance the empress, Theophilus and the other en emes held another synod in 404 and again deposed and exiled John. They appealed to a technicality in canon law --- one deposed by a synod could only be cleared by a synod of equal or greater rank. John had not been cleared by a synod. He had come back upon imperial invitation. They charged him with despising the traditions of the church. Again he quietly went into exile in the desert outside Antioch. When his enemies learned that people were writing him and making pilgrimages to consult him they ordered him moved to southern Russia. For seventy-seven days in bad weather and quite ill he was forced to keep marching until he died. His followers considered him a martyr.

In the midst of his busy ministry John Chrysostom found time for scholarship and writing. He was one of the most prolific writers of the church. In the corpus of his works are defenses, explanations and guides dealing with monasticism; there are devotional works encouraging asceticism and religious living; there are works on education; there are defenses of Christianity against heretics, pagans, and Jews. One of his most famous works was his Treatise on the Priesthood. He left a large body of letters important for a knowledge of his ideals. The largest block of his writings consists of his orations, sermons and homilies. These cover Genesis, the historical books of the Bible, Psalms, the prophets, Matthew, John, Acts, and Paul’s epistles.

After his death Augustinians attacked him for making too much of free will. Alexandrians charged him with neglecting the divinity of Christ and saying too much about Jesus as the perfect example. Alexandrians tended to see in him ideas that would be developed by Nestorius in the Christological controversy.

THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA (350-428)

Theodore of Mopsuestia was the prince of exegetes in the Eastern Church. He was to Antioch what Origen was to Alexandria and Caesarea. He was one of the most prolific writers of Christian history. He wrote commentaries covering the whole of Scripture. Theodore was born to rich parents in Antioch. He studied
rhetoric and the classics under Libanius and theology and Scripture under Diodore of Tarsus. He was a fellow student of John Chrysostom and joined him in monastic living. Once when he planned to marry a young lady, Hermoine, John Chrysostom won him back to the ascetic life. He devoted himself to ascetic exercises and the study of Scripture in the monastery of Diodore. During his monastic period he wrote a commentary on Psalms.

In 383 Bishop Flavian of Antioch ordained him to the priesthood. He served in Antioch under Flavian from 383-392. He gained great fame as a controversialist and fighter against heretics. He powerfully refuted Arians and Apollinarians. He wrote one of his greatest works, On The Incarnation.

In 392 he became bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia, occupying this post until his death in 428. Here he developed his system of exegesis. He was an ardent critic of the allegory of Origen and Alexandria. He championed a literal, linguistic, historical exegesis. To the men of the school of Antioch and to the Nestorians he was "The Interpreter." Most treasured were his commentaries on the epistles of Paul.

After his death Alexandrians denounced him for denying that Mary was the mother of God (theotokos). They accused him of being the father of Nestorian Christology, charging him with having two Christs. When Justinian tried to find a middle-of-the-road position between Antioch and Alexandria, he condemned the extremes. He took Origen to represent the extreme of Alexandria. He chose three representatives of Antioch—Theodore of Mopsuestia as the exegete, Theodoret of Cyrus as the theologian and Ibas of Edessa as the schoolman—and he called them "The Three Chapters" and had his Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 553 A.D.) condemn them as heretics.

AMBROSE OF MILAN (333-397)

Ambrose was to the West what John Chrysostom and Athanasius combined were to the East. He was the great preacher of the West, the champion of the orthodox faith, and also a very able administrator. By temperament he was the natural bishop or shepherd of his flock. He came to be reckoned as one of the four great doctors of the Western Church (Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory).

Ambrose was born in Trier, the son of Ambrose, the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul. Ambrose's father and mother were Christians. His father died when he was young and his mother took him and a brother and sister to Rome for their education. A sound literary education was followed by the study of law. He practised law until he was appointed Governor of Liguria and Emilia, with consular rank and residence in Milan in 373. He so ably filled his post and so faithfully aided his bishop in his battle against Arianism that when the bishop died in 374, the people demanded that he be their bishop and neighboring bishops approved. He was only a catechumen. He was baptized and a few days later was made bishop.

Ambrose worked hard at his preaching and became the most famous orator in the West. Pagans and Christians came to listen to his sermons to learn the science of oratory. He continued to battle Arians from the pulpit, in his writings, and in his administration. He worked to remove Arian bishops and clergy and to replace them with Nicene. He developed for his church a worship service famous for its beauty and power.
As bishop, Ambrose was the arch foe of Arian emperors and the chief ally of Nicene emperors. He was a man of force and integrity. He championed the independence of the church from imperial control regardless of the theology of the emperor. In 368 when some Christians burned a Jewish synagogue the emperor demanded that Ambrose rebuild the synagogue. Ambrose challenged the emperor from the pulpit and would not begin Lord's Supper until the emperor lifted the sentence. In 390 when a village in Thessalonica revolted and killed some Imperial officers, the emperor Theodosius in a fit of anger ordered his soldiers to butcher all the citizens of the village. Ambrose demanded that the emperor do penance and threatened him with excommunication. The emperor resisted for eight months but finally gave in and did penance. Never had a bishop been so great.

Ambrose found time to write great commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, the Song of Songs, and Luke. One of his most famous and influential works was his On the Office of the Ministry. He wrote several works on Christian morality, on asceticism and on virginity. He wrote three great works against the Arians: On the Faith, On the Holy Spirit, and On the Incarnation. He left two works on the sacraments: On the Mysteries and On Penance. He left an important corpus of letters and a number of highly treasured hymns.

Probably his greatest claim to fame was his converting Augustine who went to Milan to learn the tricks of oratory and ended up becoming a Christian. Before the Golden Age ended Augustine was already overshadowing his teacher. The church was moving into two great controversies that would absorb most of its energies: the Anthropological or Sin-Grace Controversy in which Augustine and Pelagius (a British monk) were the principals, and the Christological Controversy that began anew with the clash of Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Antioch.