

1) Explain the cult of the saints in the West and the respect for ascetics and monks in the East, including problems and theories of asceticism.

Cult of the Saints in the West

The cult of the saints started after persecution ceased and martyrs were no longer needed. The bones and graves of past martyr's from the 1st century, were early on, turned into relics and kept in shrines. These attracted all types of people, from the poor, sick, pilgrims, bishops and teachers.

During the fourth century many relics were reported to be found, transferred and installed. In 385, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, ordered the relics of Gervasius and Protasius to be moved into his basilica. The point of this was to show himself as a friend of the martyrs, them being friends of God. Consequently, this also increased his personal status and his authority. Moreover, this linked the saints to the church liturgy and early christian martyrs.

The shrines slowly multiplied all around the Mediterranean from then on. It gave the believers a presence of "invisible companions" who were able to protect and inspire them. Martyrs' and saints' anniversaries became a part of the church year, each day of the year was marked with the name of a saint. Furthermore, each person received a Christian name, linking one's identity to a saint in hope of protection and guidance.

Ascetics in Syria

In the East they mainly turned to holy men, ascetics and monks, as the honorary martyrs. In those regions the holy men assumed the role of ideal Christians. Holy men were the ones who "minted the ideal of the saint" in society.

They first appeared in Syria in the fourth and fifth centuries, then in Asia Minor and Palestine. In the Syrian style of asceticism, as described by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, the holy man lived the "life of an angel" as a hermit on the edge of a village, a wild vagrant dressed in skins, "holding demons at bay and bending the will of God by his prayers." They were thought to be so much on speaking terms with God.

Holy men usually roamed with their followers, while others preached from one spot. Villagers, pilgrims, notables and merchants went to the holy man in search of counsel, enlightenment, or comfort. People usually rushed to the death bed of a holy man to collect his last words of wisdom or turn him into a relic.

The ideology spread to Asia Minor after the fifth century and reached higher layers of society. As time passed, holy men were increasingly found in the middle of organized monastic communities, and not as much in isolation.

Theories of Asceticism

Fourth century onwards, asceticism was practiced in households and at churches. The movement raised questions on what was to be taken literally and the extents of the acts. Such as mastering one's will and desires, practicing sexual renunciation and training the soul.

The ascetic tradition found inspiration in the legacy of Origen and was picked up by like-minded people such as Evagrius of Pontus (345–399), Gregory of Nyssa (331–395), and Cassian (360–435).

The tradition evolved, focusing on techniques of prayer, discipline, self-grooming, on the mastery of mind over body and on ways of “terrorizing” the devils. Community life was more favorable over the life of a hermit in the monastic tradition.

Communities of women also came into existence early. They did not go to the desert but remained in the countryside. They pursued spiritual guidance from monks, clergymen, and bishops. Other than that, they followed the same kind of life-style as their male counterparts.

Problems of Asceticism

There were multiple problems that endangered asceticism. First, in Syria and Egypt there was excessive requirements, such as that all baptized should be celibate. Many Syrian ascetics also tended to force on themselves practices such as wearing iron collars or chains, or eating grass like animals, or fasting like serpents.

Another problem was self-denial. Different monastic groups would choose to indulge in specific trends while others did not. They choose to give up material things and material lifestyles.

The final problem was that the monastic life could be perceived as elitist. To become a monk you had to give up a lot, while only following some rules would make you a believer. The church did not want to have a form of separatism or double standard to occur. When people became monks, it carried with it the right to property, income and trade. At certain times monks were even recruited. Monasteries became crucial in performing social services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the cult of the saints started after persecution ceased and martyrs were no longer needed. In the East, people turned to holy men as their source of honorary martyrs. The theories and practices of asceticism were refined, with some problems arising about the standards of each act's extents.

2) Who was Origen and what was the Origenist controversy that led to his condemnation?

Introduction

Origen, active in the Greek East, first in Alexandria, then in Caesarea from 185-254 AD. He emerged as a genius of a new kind. Origen pioneered scholarly traditions that marked generations of theologians and gave its shape first to the intellectual landscape of the east, and through his legacy to the west. His work after death, mostly commentaries and homilies on most books of the bible, was still being argued and faced disagreement, and most were consequently lost. But the most important parts have been saved.

Origen would make typological interpretations, by looking at the old testament writings for prophetic or symbolic anticipation of Christ and of the church. Moreover, he used allegorical mode, searching for deep hidden narratives, spiritual meanings concerning God, and human existence in Alexandria. Origen also viewed the Hebrew scriptures, that were mostly rejected at the time, as entirely inspired by one God, but needed different levels of understanding and interpretation.

Origen's Work

Origen developed an exegetical method on the basis of his view, which left its mark on all biblical studies since. He was inspired by greek philosophers and ethics. On his first attempt to give a rational account of the foundations of faith, Origen authored a powerful defense of Christianity, against Celsus, written for a letter public and offers a form of platonic Christianity. Titled, "Our First Principles" he crafted the first logical system of speculative theology, containing questionable ideas.

Origen envisioned a pre-existing chain of rational beings or souls which merge into bodily existence by their own free will and love, and that later return to God through successive existence. When returned at the end there would be a final restoration of all spirits. Thus human spirit later reintegrates to the original unity once fully experiencing all of history.

Origen further expanded his ideas in, "Commentary on The Song of Songs" identifying the theory of three sciences, moral instruction, knowledge of the world and contemplation of God.

Origen's Legacy

Origen's legacy came to life mainly among Alexandrian and Cappadocian fathers, making Christianity both acceptable and respectable in the eyes of cultured people. Origen's influences were on the people that followed him over the years.

The first promoter of Origen's work was the father of church history, Eusebius of Caesarea (265-339). Eusebius inherited Origen's library in Caesarea and also adopted Origen's scholarly approach and vision. He succeeded in popularizing some of Origen's themes, releasing "Ecclesiastical History", firsthand information on divine origin, God's special providence, all human history and Christianity. Moreover, he imitated Origen by showing that christianity fulfilled pagan and jewish aspirations.

Another prominent promoter of Origen's ideas was Evagrius of Pontus (345-399). Evagrius was well trained in greek learning, and spent time among the "Origenists" in Palestine where he converted to an ascetic life. He was a famously known ascetic and cultured man, later arriving in the Egyptian desert in 382. Over the years, he translated Origen's notion of the three sciences, moral, philosophical and contemplative, into a system of spirituality that influenced all Christian traditions.

The Origenist Controversy

There were four stages to the Origenist Controversy. The first stage occurs with the publication of "on First Principles" and its aftermath. In this publication Origen was interested in addressing a christian audience that were interested in philosophical questions that were not yet settled by the church. He hypothesized the preexistence of the souls, the unions of souls with the body, the imaging of god, the status of the son and the restoration of all things.

The second stage took place fourth century onwards, when discussion broke out among the followers of Origen. Not all of Origen's followers had good sense when using the allegorical method and fully understanding Origen's ideas. Some believed that the allegorical method was the only true approach, and rejected any representation of God. To them, everything had to be interpreted spiritually.

The third stage began to occur when the Arian party had provoked opponents among the Orthodox. Epiphanius of Salamis (310/320-403) saw how much Egypt was torn apart on the subject of Origen's legacy. This led Epiphanius to write "Panarion" (374-377), charging Origen with heresy, which is having opinion contrary to the orthodox sector of christianity, also viewing Origen's christological views as the source of Arianism.

The fourth stage was carried on up to the second council of Constantinople, in 553. Emperor Justinian had given a list of objectionable statements that were attributed to Origen to Menas, patriarch of Constantinople. Those statements were made public at a synod in Constantinople and confirmed at the general council of 553. Most of Origen's work was forbidden and most of it was lost. Origen had written his works prior to the rules set in theological vocabulary and christological dogma, his work was condemned without any regard to the changes over time in history.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Origen's legacy came to life mainly among Alexandrian and Cappadocian fathers, making Christianity both acceptable and respectable in the eyes of cultured people. Later, when Origen's work was spoken about it was mostly oversimplifications and reduced statements made by his bitter foes. Origen's influence did not stop fully after and his ideas can still be seen in different writing today even though his work was forbidden at the general council of 553.