

CH 517 *The Patristic Church*

**Final Examination, posted: May 6, 2026**

**To be returned via e-mail on or before Thursday, May 21, 2026** (no extensions possible!)

Please answer all parts of all three questions

---

**To be returned electronically via e-mail ([ldvsinger@stjohnsem.edu](mailto:ldvsinger@stjohnsem.edu)) by Thursday, May 21, 2026.**

In your answers, when you cite primary texts (as I hope you will) DO NOT simply cut and paste the text into your answer. SUMMARIZE ACCURATELY what the relevant text says, just as you would in any real pastoral situation, and give the relevant citation in a footnote. Please answer all parts of all three questions. There is no minimum or maximum number of pages.

*Please remember that whenever your answers include anything other than your own words or ideas, you must place the cited text in quotation marks and include appropriate references. When citing text from the Internet always include in your reference the original author and source of the material you cited, together with the Webpage HTTP reference. For example:*

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, 103.4. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1103.htm>

And **not** merely: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1103.htm>

---

**1. Why did St. Athanasius object to the use of the term *homoiousios* in describing the relationship of Christ to God the Father? How does this relate to his doctrine of *theosis*?**

---

**2. Describe the effects on the developing Christian Church of the conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine. Please include in your answer a discussion of his reasons for and his role in combating heresy.**

---

**2. What were the theological and political consequences of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon? How do these affect the Christian churches today?**

CONVERT DOCX files

<http://www.convertfiles.com/downloadpage.php?subdir=0639855001553899435/&ID=110888890>

## EXAM QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

1. How do the pre-Christian (pagan and Jewish) sources we have studied help us to better understand the concepts of “spiritual vision”, rewards and punishment after death for virtue and vice, and service to one’s community found in the New Testament and the lives of the saints?

1. As we discussed in class, pagan notions of the afterlife would have made Christianity’s teaching regarding eternal life in paradise very attractive. The most influential pagan authors we studied were Plato, Homer, Virgil, and Cicero. Plato’s Myth of Er in the Republic describes an afterlife of punishment or refreshment, depending on whether one has lived a virtuous life. He also believed in multiple metempsychoses/ (reincarnations) that allowed for moral and contemplative improvement in future lives. Homer’s depiction of the realm of the dead in the Odyssey is bleak, to say the least – a world of sad shadows; while Virgil allows military and political heroes some hope of avoiding eternal punishment and pain. Cicero’s “Dream of Scipio” describes ascent into the heavenly spheres for those who sought virtue and served their country. The Book of Enoch depicts a prophet “transfigured” by the vision of the Throne of God, using language familiar to Christians in both the Gospels (Jesus’ transfiguration) and the Book of Acts (“tongues of Fire at Pentecost).

1. Very good discussion of Livy on the Bacchanalia and Homer’s description of the underworld. In the context of “spiritual vision” and the role of contemplation/*theoria* in spiritual progress, both in this world and the next It would also have been appropriate to mention Plato’s *Myth of Er* and *Parable of the Caves* as well as Cicero’s Latin retelling of this in his *Republic*.

At least two authors discussed of the following 6

PLATO [bleak] 1]  
HOMER [2 – bleak]  
VIRGIL [ bleak but hopeful 2]  
LIVY –Bacchanalia]  
CICERO [ spheres and virtue/service to country] 1  
ENOCH transfig 1 and tongues 1]

7 pt.

2. Describe the different “clerical orders” (levels of church leadership and ministry) mentioned in Clement’s Letter to the Corinthians. [1pt]

a) How are these orders similar to or different from those described in the *Didache*, [1pt] the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, [1pt] and the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus? [1pt]

b) Is there a doctrine of apostolic succession [2pt – Clement and Irenaeus] or any suggestion of papal primacy [2pt Clement and Irenaeus] in these or any of these texts we have studied? If so, describe it.

7 points total

---

2. You properly describe Clement's presentation of orders in their historical context; however, in regard to clerical orders in the early Church, the key points in comparing Clement with Ignatius are that Clement does have a doctrine of apostolic succession, although for him the terms *episkopos* and *presbyteros* are equivalent, and he thus knows only two orders – bishop-presbyter, and deacon. Ignatius, however, emphasizes a monarchical episcopate with a clearly-defined threefold ministry (on deacons see course website: Magn 2.6, 2.13; Smyrn. 6.8), but he does not have a doctrine of (episcopal) apostolic succession, but rather a kind of analogy of relationship.

The *Didache* includes, in addition to the offices of Bishop and deacon, the more primitive designations “prophet” and “teacher”. We discussed in class that these older titles referred primarily to itinerant teachers and charismatic preachers who were being replaced by local ministers who were designated by the local community, set apart (presumably by the laying on of hands) and called bishop (*episkopos*) and deacon (*diakonos*).

Please be more careful in future in using the English term “priest” in regard to clerical orders prior to the fourth century. As we have noted many times in class, the term “priest” (Latin *sacerdos*, Greek *hierus*) did NOT refer in the early Church to the level of leadership we would today designate by that title. It was the BISHOP not the PRESBYTER who was called “priest” by the authors who were comfortable using priestly language to describe the office of leadership and presidency. It was the BISHOP and not the PRESBYTER who presided by right at the Eucharist. Thus in the early Church “priest” is NOT the same thing as “presbyter”.

With regard to papal primacy, The fact that Clement writes as bishop of Rome and reprimands the community in Corinth suggests or at least hints at the right of the bishop of Rome to correct abuses in other churches. Irenaeus is more explicit when he writes with regard to the church of Rome “it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre- eminent authority.” Against heresies, ( 3.3.2) I the same passage he also assumes a doctrine of apostolic succession in describing our faith “which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops.”

It would also have been good to mention that in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, : presbyters share in the priestly office of Bishop, whereas deacons do not

---

3. What do the descriptions of the martyrdoms of Polycarp, Perpetua, and Felicity tell us about the new role as intercessors and intermediaries these saints were believed to have acquired as a result of their sacrifice? What difficulties did this role raise for bishops with regard to excommunication and reconciliation?

3. Your discussion is complete in itself, but one additional point in regard to the martyrs' role as “intercessors” is the fact that this role was very widespread – indeed, almost universal – in classical antiquity. An advocate/spokesperson/intercessor was necessary in law, in families,

and in almost all social contexts. Christian martyrs were unique from a variety of perspectives, but notably because their intercessory roles did not depend on patronage by the wealthy or powerful, but rather was due to the virtue of their public “witness” (*martyria*) to Christ.

It would be important to note that in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, Polycarp is described as one who offers his sacrifice for all, namely for the whole Church; and that he is described as one who prays for all. Perpetua is similarly described as an intercessor, privileged by God with reassuring visions, who is able to offer effective intercession, even for the dead.

With regard to the reconciliation of penitents, it is important to note that in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, Christians are not allowed to deliberately seek martyrdom for themselves. We discussed in class the significance of pagan certificates (*libelli*) that attested to offering prayer and sacrifice or incense to Caesar’s “genius” (guardian spirit or deity). We also discussed the martyrs’ *libelli* that illustrate the difficulty bishops such as Cyprian of Carthage faced when confronted by apostate Christians who claimed the right of reconciliation because a martyr had prayed for them and signed a *libellus*.

---

## TERTULLIAN versus CLEMENT

2. You correctly distinguish between the respective approaches of Tertullian and Clement. It would have been good to mention Tertullian’s appeal, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians?”, and to compare it with Clement’s conviction that a faith easily shaken by rational thought is not worth having.

Tertullian regards Philosophy as dangerous to Christian faith and a source of heresy, exemplified in his famous cry, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? He specifically links philosophy with Gnosticism. For Clement, on the other hand, a faith that can be dispelled by rational thought is not worth having.

He claims that Valentinus, a gnostic founder and teacher “was of Plato's school”

Unhappy Aristotle! who invented for these men dialectics, the art of building up and pulling down

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians?

We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus

Against Heretics, ch. 7

TERTULLIAN: Philosophy as dangerous (1 pt.); as a source of heresy (1 pt) mention gnosticism – extra credit point

CLEMENT:

---

1. What is the significance of the word *homoiousios* in the theological and political controversies of the fourth century? Why did Athanasius object to the use of this term in describing the relationship of Christ to God the Father, and how does this relate to his doctrine of *theosis*?

a) The term *homoiousios* was used by Arius and his followers as a way of emphasizing Christ's subordination to (i.e. lesser rank) the Father, and of stating unequivocally the Christ is not "God" in the same sense (that is, in the same essence or substance) as God the Father.

b) The term *homoiousios* (of "like" essence) diminishes the divinity of Christ, implying that Christ is a creature, and in the words of Arius, "There was when he was not", - Alexandrian/Egyptian Church would always - even to the present time - continue to emphasize a "high" Christology, rejecting, for example the Council of Chalcedon in favor of "monophysitism" (or "henophysitism")

c) For Athanasius, our salvation is accomplished because "God became human so that human beings might become God (or "divine")" (De Incarn. 54.3) for Christ to save us through divinization (*theosis*) He must Himself be fully divine: i.e. not in any sense less than the Father.

---

1. Good discussion of Athanasius' theology. It would also be appropriate to note that for Athanasius the term *homoiousios* could accurately be used to describe **our** relationship with God (that is, we human beings become "like God"): but it does not accurately describe Christ's relationship with the Father.

1. The specific point I had hoped you would raise in regard to Athanasius' doctrine of *theosis* and the controversy over the *homoousios* is that, for Athanasius, Christ the Savior must be fully divine in order to effect the *theosis*/salvation of humanity.

1. What you write about Athanasius is correct. However, the specific point I had hoped you would raise in regard to Athanasius' doctrine of *theosis* and the controversy over the *homoousios* is that, for Athanasius, Christ the Word of God must be fully divine in order to effect the *theosis*/salvation of humanity. It would also be appropriate to note that for Athanasius the term *homoiousios* could accurately be used to describe **our** relationship with God (that is, we human beings become "like God"): but it does not accurately describe Christ's relationship with the Father.

---

---

1) How do the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon reflect the theological differences between the "Antiochene" and "Alexandrian" approaches to Christology?

1. The question concerns the difference between Antiochene and Alexandrian Christology. However, you do not describe or even mention the difference between these two approaches: namely, that the Antiochene theologians who emphasized the literal sense of scripture tended to highlight the humanity of Christ; while the Alexandrians employed allegory heavily and emphasized Our Lord's divinity,

1. Very good discussion of the conciliar theological formulations, together with the relevant approaches of Nestorius and Cyril. In regard to the Council of Chalcedon, it would have been good also to make at least some mention of Eutyches' apparent monophysitism, as well as the role of Pope St. Leo, whose "Tome" was praised and formed the basis of the definition, thus representing the first time papal theological opinion was praised and emphasized by eastern theologians.

---

2. Gregory the Great has been described as the first medieval pope. Discuss this title in light of his: (1) attitude towards the (Byzantine) Eastern Empire; (2) approach to (and use of) monasticism; (3) Eucharistic theology.

3) How does (a) the eucharistic theology of Pope St. Gregory the Great and (b) his understanding of the purpose of sacred images in the liturgy differ from that of the Eastern Orthodox churches? With regard to eastern sources, please include in your discussion (at least) reference to Maximus Confessor, (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

First, as regards the Eucharist: the biggest difference between the western theology embodied in Gregory and the theology prevalent in the east is the emphasis on *theosis*.

For Gregory, the Eucharist is a sacrifice offered to God on behalf of a badly damaged universe. It is primarily an opportunity to praise an all good God, and to plead for His mercy. This perspective makes more sense if we remember Gregory's context: the city of Rome and whole western empire was a failing civilization, and Gregory was encouraging the Church to pray for mercy. It is in this context as well that private Masses have a meaning, and daily Mass can be a normal occurrence even without a congregation.

In Eastern theology, on the other hand, the point of the Eucharist has to do with deification for the congregation. Accordingly, Maximus refers to the Eucharist as "the sacrament that transforms into itself those who worthily partake of it"<sup>1</sup>, and Dionysius says that the Eucharist grants the receiver "as a gift from God its mysterious perfecting capacities"<sup>2</sup>. Because of this emphasis, there is no reason in the Eastern mind to have private Mass or daily Masses. In a parallel sense, the Eastern mind also has no use for strictly contemplative religious life devoid of any potential apostolate.

It is worth noting that Gregory also believed and taught deification/theosis, as the Church in the West always has. Gregory is more careful with his language when describing Theosis, however, reminding us that no creature ever becomes God by nature<sup>3</sup>. He seems to prefer the language, still more common in the west, of nature, fall, and sanctifying grace.

Regarding images, Gregory teaches that as long as we maintain some care not to adore the paintings, statues, or windows, they can serve as valuable catechetical material. We must remember that this was an age in which literacy was an uncommon privilege. Therefore, Gregory says that in the image "the illiterate read... a picture takes the place of reading"<sup>4</sup>. Gregory instructs his people to learn from their images, not worship them, and not to break them, as was happening in the East, in the Iconoclasm controversy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, Chapter 21, [http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0650\\_max-con/02\\_max-txt1.htm](http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0650_max-con/02_max-txt1.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Dionysius the Aeropogite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Book 2, Chapter 3, §1, [http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0500\\_dion\\_aer/02\\_dion-cel-eccl.htm](http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0500_dion_aer/02_dion-cel-eccl.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia on Job*, Book II.23.42, [http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/CH\\_501\\_Intro/13\\_Lat\\_Theol/00a\\_start.htm](http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/CH_501_Intro/13_Lat_Theol/00a_start.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Gregory the Great, *Letter to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles*, Book 11, Letter 13, [http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0600\\_greg-1/50\\_lets-images.htm](http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0600_greg-1/50_lets-images.htm)

In the East, images were and are a testament to the reality of the incarnation. They are an opportunity to see into heaven, to participate now in the eternal truth which Christ took from heavenly realms and made accessible to our earthly senses. The Second Council of Nicaea defined that, while they must not be worshipped, they may be honored or venerated, with the understanding that the honor passes from the image to the one whom the image stands for, whether it be Jesus, Mary, or one of the Saints; ultimately all of the honor is to God. This fits with the eastern theme of *theosis*: the very matter of the icon, the wood and paint, are transformed from their lowly state to be a true representation of the eternal God who truly took on matter in a human body. Because of this, eastern icons, even of the Crucifixion, must be beautiful, and they must follow the patterns and rules, based on the earliest sources; there is much less artistic liberty than in the west.

- a. Gregory specifically objected to and rejected the Archbishop of Constantinople's title of "Ecumenical Patriarch."
- b. He not only founded monasteries and was a monk himself, but he wrote the biography of St. Benedict, and used monks as bishops and missionaries (the latter especially in the case of St. Augustine of Canterbury)
- c. An important aspect of this question is Gregory's emphasis on the Sacrifice of the Mass as a representation of Christ's sacrifice to the Father, who can be viewed as a "dread Lord" whose wrath against sinful humanity must be appeased.

---

3. What benefits did the papacy receive from the crowning of Charlemagne as *Emperor of the West* in 800? What new dangers did the papacy experience as a result of the creation of a western Christian emperor? How did the relationship between the Holy Roman Emperor in the West differ from the relationship between the Eastern Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople?

3. Good discussion of the benefits and dangers of the rise of Carolingian power. Also significant – and both useful and extremely problematic - was the gift of what would become the Papal States.

Significant differences between the Byzantine and Holy Roman (Western) Emperors included:

(a) The Eastern conviction that the Emperor (not the Pope or Bishop of Rome) had the power to summon an ecumenical council; (b) the Holy Roman Emperor was usually a German prince who was never able to assert universal authority like his Eastern counterpart; thus nations such as France and England were never part of his domain.

1. Increasing conflict with Byzantium over title and jurisdiction
  2. Another important point with regard to the Carolingian period and the actions of Charlemagne that should be noted was his bestowal on the papacy of the problematic gift of the Papal States. As we discussed numerous times in class, on the one hand they were both necessary in the context of feudalism (the Pope could not be regarded as significant unless he controlled a large political territory); but the Papal States were also problematic because their defense imposed on an essentially spiritual leader (the Pope) the necessity of assuming responsibility as military and political sovereign, thus involving the Church in endless struggles with secular rulers for territory, property, and jurisdiction.
-

4. Describe both the positive and negative effects of the Crusades on the economic and religious culture of the Christian West.

[1] By the commerce, the rise of towns and a sort of middle class (what would be called in France the “Third Estate”. Intellectual awakening with availability of new texts and widespread awareness of the wider world, including the Christian and non-Christian East, which the Crusades stimulated the cities of northern Italy and of the great trade route over the Alps and down the Rhine rose to importance.

[2] By the sacrifices of feudal lands and property which they involved, a new political element, that of the towns—a “third estate”—was greatly stimulated, especially in France.

[3] The mental horizon of the Western world was immeasurably extended. Thousands who had grown up in the densest ignorance and narrow-mindedness were brought into contact with the splendid cities and ancient civilization of the East.

[4] Everywhere there was intellectual awakening. The period witnessed the highest theological development of the Middle Ages—that of Scholasticism.

[5] It beheld great popular religious movements, in and outside of the church.

[6] It saw the development of the universities.

[7] In it the study of Roman law became a transforming influence.

[8] Modern vernacular literature began to flourish.

[9] A great artistic development, the national architecture of northern France, misnamed the Gothic, now ran its glorious career.

with regard to feudalism, it would have been also good to say something about the fundamental presuppositions of the feudal system, which emphasized mutual loyalty and obligation. It promoted loyalty to a local feudal lord in exchange for military protection. Part of the responsibility of the feudal “subject” or “vassal” to his “liege” was the obligation to provide military service; and the feudal lord looked on his vassal as a sort of subordinate officer. Thus the higher clergy, who were regarded as feudal lords in their own right came to be seen as “vassals” of the king, with an expectation on the part of the king that he would be involved in their appointment and to some extent in their administration. At a lower level, barons and other secular lords regarded parish churches as part of their property and responsibility, and they believed they had the right to control appointment of lesser clergy.

---

2) How is the Investiture Controversy an understandable consequence of the social/political system of feudalism?

2. Very good, detailed discussion of the origin and nature of the investiture controversy and the complex, painful interrelationship between papal and imperial authority in the Christian West.

It would have been also good to say something about the nature of the feudal system, which emphasized mutual loyalty and obligation. It promoted loyalty to a local feudal lord in exchange for military protection. Part of the responsibility of the feudal “subject” or “vassal” to his “liege” was the obligation to provide military service; and the feudal lord looked on his vassal as a sort of subordinate officer. Thus the higher clergy, who were regarded as feudal lords in their own right came to be seen as “vassals” of the king, with an expectation on the part of the king that he would be involved in their appointment and to some extent in their administration. At a lower level, barons and other secular lords

regarded parish churches as part of their property and responsibility, and they believed they had the right to control appointment of lesser clergy.

---

---

---