

Class 10a

ASCETIC FASTING: ANOREXIA AS A PATH TO POWER

Outline

- The fourth-century context
 - Fourth-century transitions
 - Consequent changes in Christian thought and practice
- Ascetic fasting in Christian authors
 - Basil of Ancyra
 - Gregory of Nyssa
 - Jerome
- Connections between early Christian fasting and *anorexia nervosa* today?

THE FOURTH-CENTURY CONTEXT

The Fourth-century Context

Transitions

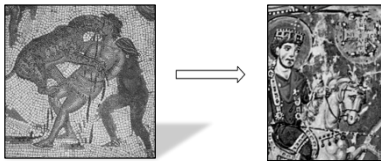
- 250 CE Empire-wide persecutions as Roman empire suffers serious setbacks
- 303 CE
- 313 CE Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity

- 380 CE Emperor Theodosius makes Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire

The Fourth-century Context

Consequent Changes in Christian Thought & Practice

- It's increasingly easy—even necessary—to become Christian
- This prompts a reconsideration of what it means to be Christian
 - How do you relate to the *world* now?
 - What should your relationship be to your body?
 - And how should you relate to the Christian community now that everyone is flooding in?



The Fourth-century Context

Consequent Changes in Christian Thought & Practice

- This also spawns the mass production of literature promoting asceticism
 - lives of ascetics
 - rules for home monasticism
 - epistles encouraging asceticism
- In this literature
 - scripture is interpreted elaborately
 - desire becomes increasingly problematic
 - female virginity becomes increasingly a concern



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ASCETIC FASTING IN CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

Ascetic Fasting

in the Christian Authors



What fasting strategies were used to manage the ascetic body, and what benefits were they thought to bring?

- Basil of Ancyra
- Gregory of Nyssa
- Jerome

CONNECTIONS TO ANOREXIA NERVOSA TODAY?

Are there any connections between ascetic fasting in early Christianity and anorexia today?

- Is fasting regarded as a cure or a disease? What is the illness is cures? What is the cause of the disease?
- Why does an individual choose it? What is gained?
- What is the ideal body? What effects is fasting thought to have on the body?
- What is the goal? Consider the similarities or differences in views of how a woman saves or controls herself.
- How it's "marketed" or advocated socially?
