

Tertullian and Constantine

by Michael Haykin

This sermon explores the history and theology of Montanism, a Christian movement in the 2nd century, and its significance in the context of the early Church.

Duration: 1:53:42

Scripture: John 16:12

Topics: "Early Church", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the Montanism movement and its impact on the early church. The Montanists were known for their prophecies and their belief in the ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit. However, their lack of self-control and rationality raised concerns among other Christians. The Montanists also influenced the canon of the Bible, as some churches began to question the inclusion of certain books based on the Montanists' use of the book of John.

Transcript

Well, we made a start last week looking at the church in the early Roman Empire. And tonight we want to look at two things. In the first hour, a movement known as Montanism, and a theologian, North African theologian named Tertullian, who became an apologist for the Montanist movement.

And then in the second hour, I realized after I went through the line-up, as it were, of topics that we are going to be looking at in the five or so weeks of these lectures, that I didn't have any place for Constantine, and the massive change that takes place in the fourth century. And so I'm actually going to be doing a little juggling. Instead of looking at the canon this week, I'm going to postpone that to the second hour of next week.

And in the second hour tonight, we are going to look at the revolutionary changes that are introduced by Constantine, and the toleration or the recognition of Christianity as a legal religion in the Roman Empire. And the changes are massive. And I'm not sure why it slipped my mind when I was preparing the outline of the lectures, and I completely glossed over that.

And so next week, in the second hour, we will look at the canon, which means that the issue of the Arian controversy and the struggle regarding the deity of the Holy Spirit, because both of those are struggles in the fourth century, is the stun fully God? Is the Spirit God? We will have to do that in one hour. So, tonight then, in the first hour, we look at a movement called Montanism, which raises the issues of the canon. And

then in the second hour, we want to turn our views to this individual named Constantine.

Next week, we will look then, in the second hour, at the canon. It's a very important issue. It was Jonathan Edwards, the American theologian, who once said the following, that the sum of the blessings Christ sought by what he did and suffered in the work of redemption was the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The sum of the blessings Christ sought by what he did and suffered in the work of redemption was the gift of the Holy Spirit. And a casual glance at the New Testament would confirm the truth of that observation. You run through the New Testament, you think about what it is that the Spirit does in the believer's life and in the life of the church, and how necessary, utterly necessary, is the work of the Spirit.

It is the Spirit by which a man or a woman is led to confess Christ, 1 Corinthians 12, 3. No man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we worship God adequately. Philippians 3, verses 2 and 3, where Paul identifies the church as those who worship God by the Spirit.

It is the Spirit who makes preaching and teaching efficacious and powerful and effective. 1 Peter 1, verses 10 to 12, where Peter talks about the Spirit having been sent down from heaven and enabling those who preach the good news. It is the Spirit, 2 Timothy 1, verse 14, who is the guarantor or the preserver of orthodoxy.

We tend to think of that as maybe the church or we tend to think of it at times as a great man of God who he raises up, but ultimately it's the Spirit. 2 Timothy 1, verse 14, where Paul says, guard the good deposit by the Spirit who dwells in you. There are many other vital aspects of the Spirit's work we could mention, but let me draw your attention to one that will come up a number of times in this first lecture, and it's part of the promise that Jesus gives during what's called His farewell discourse in John 16, 12 to 13.

John 16, verses 12 to 13. And I'm reading out of the New Living Translation. Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting His own ideas. He will be telling you what He has heard.

He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever He receives from me. It's the little phrase there, or the sentence there, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.

There has been, and we'll see it occupies much of the content of our lecture tonight, there has been a great debate going on for the last pretty well 2,000 years, but definitely since the period we're looking at, the late 2nd century, about what does Jesus mean by those words. An early Christian commentator, a man that we looked at actually last week, Irenaeus, in a passage in which he is talking about the fact that Scripture is perfect, and he's refusing the Gnostics. Again, recall those of you we heard last week that heresy, that denied some of the cardinal truths of the Christian faith, such as the resurrection of the body, and the goodness of the material world, and so on.

In a passage in which Irenaeus is refuting that view, and he's talking about the perfection of Scripture, he says this about the Apostles, the ones who wrote it. After our Lord rose from the dead, the Apostles were invested with power from on high, when the Holy Spirit came down upon them, were filled from all his gifts, and had perfect knowledge. And I think the passage he's thinking of is this passage here in John 16, verses 12 and 13.

That the Apostles, that that verse applies primarily to the Apostles. It's a promise to the Apostles. And therefore, that verse finds its fulfillment in the writing of Scripture.

And what God is doing by His Spirit after the writing of Scripture is illuminating the Word for those who come after. And that way, leading them into truth. At the time of the early church, the very early church in the first century, the Spirit's work is somewhat different.

He is inspiring men whom God has raised up to put down with pen and ink the words we know as the New Testament. And there's inspiration going on. And first, John 16, verse 13 is, I think, primarily a reference to that.

And that's the way Irenaeus understands it. If you take it, though, as a reference to the entire history of the church, that there is fresh truth. And fresh truth in the sense of on the same level of Scripture that this verse is talking about being revealed all through the history of the church.

You're in serious problems. And we'll see this very clearly tonight with Montanism and the author known as Tertullian. Now, Montanism, what is it and who stands behind it and so on? Well, Montanism is a noun that is derived from the name of a man named Montanus.

And we know virtually nothing about him. In fact, in a minute I'm going to read a paragraph which gives us probably the sum of our knowledge about this gentleman in terms of his career. We know something about his ideas from sayings that he said.

He appears on the scene of church history around the year 170 AD. And he appears in what is now modern Turkey, in those days the Roman province of Asia, in the central portion of that, the central highlands of what now is Turkey. And here is one writer, a man named Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived 150 years later, who is quoting a writer that lived at the same time as Montanus.

And this is what that writer, we don't know his name, because Eusebius doesn't tell us who he's quoting. But he's quoting a contemporary of Montanus who is now going to describe the career of Montanus. There is said to be a Nicaea near Phrygia.

You probably know of Phrygia. It's mentioned in the New Testament, in the book of Acts. Again, it's in Asia Minor.

There is said to be a Nicaea near Phrygia, a certain village called Ardabab. There they say first, when Gratis was pro-consul of Asia, that a recent convert to the faith named Montanus, in his soul's immense ambitious desire, gave the adversary access to himself, and was carried away by the spirit, and suddenly experiencing some kind of possession and furious ecstasy, he was inspired and began to speak and say strange things, prophesying contrary to the customs related to the tradition and the succession of the church from the beginning. That's the sum, really, in that one paragraph there that I've just read, is the sum of our knowledge about this man who stands at the fountainhead of the movement known as the Montanus movement, or Montanism.

A number of things can be noted here. He was a recent convert, according to this, when he began to prophesy, and prophesy in a manner that was deeply disturbing to those who saw and heard him. And other writers that we have give a very clear indication that Montanus prophesies when they were in the context of prophesying appear to lose self-control.

They appear to lose rational control over what they were doing and saying. And this becomes a fundamental area of criticism by those who are in the church as they look at what these people are doing. They have real problems with the fact that they have completely lost control, any sort of self-control and rational control.

The only other information we really have from Montanus comes from a variety of sayings. There's about 20 of them, and I've given you some over on the second page of that handout. And I've given you six.

And there are, as I say, about 20 or so more, well, there's about 20 in total, some of them from Montanus, some of them from two or three prophetesses who became key leaders in this movement. There is a prophetess named Maximilla, Priscilla and Quintilla. And let me read the first couple to give you some idea as to what Montanism claimed to be.

These are, all of these writings are from what we would describe as orthodox writers or opponents of Montanism. Montanus says, I am the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Another writer.

Montanus says, I, the Lord, the Almighty God, remain among men. Now some early Christian authors claimed that Montanus was actually claiming to be God. And I don't think that these quotes bear that out.

What I think these quotes are actually bearing out, and that's all we've got. They'll quote this and then move on to attacking Montanus' views. I think what these quotes indicate is that Montanus claimed that he was inspired on the same level as the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament writers.

And that how you have a number of times in the Old Testament writings where the prophet speaks in the first person. God speaking through the prophet in the first person. I think that's what's being claimed here.

In other words, quite clearly, Montanism, and we'll see this when we get to Tertullian. Montanism claimed to be on a level of inspiration equivalent to Scripture. That's the first key point to note about Montanism.

The second point that's also bothered many of those in the church. There was a glorification of martyrdom. Last week, when we looked at the persecution of the early church, one of the things we noted was the prominent place that the martyrs had because the church was under heavy, heavy attack.

And even in this period, men and women who own Christ as Lord have to be prepared to die for their faith. And so, we have these two statements. As we will see, they'll push it much further than most others in the church would like to go.

The Spirit says, you will be publicly displayed. This is saying number three. That is good for you.

For whoever is not publicly displayed before men will be publicly displayed before God. Let it not perplex you. Righteousness brings you into the midst.

The midst of a court is understood there. What perplexes you about winning glory? Opportunity is given when you are seen by men. Now that statement, and we'll see, Tertullian actually quotes that.

It's a prophecy, so-called, given by a monstrous prophet or prophetess that Tertullian claims is the word of God for his day. And it's obscure if we didn't have some other statements and number four clears it up because number four clearly is referring to martyrdom. And then reading back into number three you can see what number three is talking about is the issue of martyrdom.

Four, the Spirit speaks, desire not to die in bed nor in the delivery of children nor by innervating fevers but in martyrdom that he may be glorified who has suffered for you. And so there was an early monsonism a claim that the words that these monstrous prophets and prophetesses gave were on a level with scripture. Secondly, there was a glorification of martyrdom.

Again, number five, if you should die for God as the paraclete that's the Greek word that our Lord uses in John 14-16 in a cluster of passages dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit. John 14-26-27 John 15-26-27 and then John 16-8-13 A number of the titles our Lord gives to the Spirit include the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit and the paraclete or the helper or the advocate. Actually, the English words if you look at a variety of translations to translate the Greek word you get a whole host of words and none of them can really accurately, I think, capture the range of meaning in the word.

The word has the idea of a helper, has the idea of somebody who stands beside you in a court of law and speaks in your defense. Somebody who gives you aid and strength and so on. If you should die for God as the paraclete instructs not in mild fevers and on your beds but in martyrdoms if you take up your cross and follow the Lord as he himself commands your blood is the complete key of paradise.

And you have there very clearly a glorification of martyrdom. A third or a fourth aspect if we count the idea of the losing of self-control among the prophets and prophetesses the fourth aspect of early martyrdom was the prediction that the end of history and time was about to take place. And for the one, this is number six, for the one they call Maximilla the prophetess declares after me there will no longer be a prophet but the end.

And I haven't given you one but there's another one given by Priscilla a prophetess also in the movement who claims that the new Jerusalem was going to come down and be built in on the site of a little village in the middle of Asia Minor called Papusa. And so there is this conviction that the spirit is speaking in a way that he spoke in the New Testament period. There is fresh words of God that are equivalent to Scripture being given.

There is among some of the prophets and prophetesses in the movement a loss of self-control when they are speaking prophecy. There is a glorification of martyrdom and there is a prediction that the end of time and history is at hand. Now we'll see when we turn to Tertullian that there are other features that he is interested in as well.

So those are some of the early aspects of monsonism that we know and not so much because we know anything about the careers of the leaders in the movement but because of these very sayings and statements that are quoted by their opponents. Now the response of the church to monsonism was not surprising. As the spirits, if you want to put it that way, were tested the monsonist movement became quite clear.

It fell short in a number of areas and yet it grew rapidly and by the year 200 within about 30, maybe 40 years of the early monsonists beginning to prophesy we have monsonists in Rome, we have monsonists in southern France and we have monsonists in North Africa. So it quickly spread throughout churches and it split churches. We'll see this as one of the problems that the monsonist movement did.

It didn't build necessarily, it split churches. People said, the monsonists, the prophecies are real. And others said, no, as we read scripture we've got problems with this.

Well now let's turn to Tertullian and of all the early monsonists he is the most famous and he is in many respects there is much that we can admire about Tertullian. He has a number of very important gifts that he gives to the church and we'll look at one of them regarding the doctrine of Trinity at the end. Like many other early Christian authors we know next to nothing in great detail about Tertullian.

We know more about Tertullian than we do about monsonists. A lot more. We have a fair number of Tertullian's books.

But we don't know details about his early life. It used to be argued among older historians that he was born around the year 160 died around the year 225. The truth of the matter is we really only know the period between 190 and 215.

190 when he suddenly appears as a Christian and a Christian leader. 215 when his last book is written. And in other words then we don't know really when he was born we don't know when he died.

He tells us that before his conversion he frequently went to the Roman amphitheater. And he remembers going there as a Christian now He remembers it was shame and disgrace that he took delight in the horrific scenes of men killing other men for sport and for the pleasure of the spectators. He remembers it was shame and disgrace.

He can describe himself on a number of occasions as a great sinner. And some of it is thinking back I'm sure to his life before conversion but some of it may be his awareness of God's mercy and grace in his life even after his conversion and so on. The circumstances and date of the exact date of his conversion are not known.

He's definitely a Christian by around the year 190. How did he become a Christian? Again it's not known but some historians have argued that it could very well have been observing martyrs. And he has one little passage in a book called To Scapula.

Scapula was the Roman governor in North Africa at the time. And he says this Our religion which you know is growing stronger at the very moment when it seems to be cut down will never perish. For whoever beholds such a noble endurance of the martyrs will first as though struck by some kind of uneasiness be driven to inquire what is the matter in question and then when he knows the truth immediately follow the same way.

He could be speaking autobiographically. He could be indicating what he had known experience was as he was in the amphitheater and he does tell us he went there a lot. And he was in Carthage and there were Christians martyred in Carthage in the amphitheater.

And it could very well be as he's watching them it suddenly comes into his mind why are these people dying like this? The gladiators he can understand as a Roman I mean these people are armed to the teeth and the wealthy gladiators some of them would win their freedom and the gladiators in those days were the football stars and the baseball stars and archaeologists have actually found written on the walls of some of the buildings that are being excavated the graffiti Roman graffiti with the names of the gladiators and one could understand them but these people dying utterly defenseless many of them singing many of them with joy and it could very well be and as I say we don't know this for a fact it could very well be that Tertullian saw this and why? and began to inquire and so was converted.

We know that he was married he has a marvellous book written to his wife it's called To His Wife and there is a really fabulous passage and maybe an ideal but a fabulous passage about what Christian marriage is like and I've actually given it there for you How beautiful then the marriage of two Christians two are one in hope one in desire one in the way of life they follow one in the religion they practice the word religion that he uses as many other Christians did they use it in a positive sense we sometimes today we compare Christianity to religion and just so that you're aware they use it in a positive sense they are as brother and sister both servants of the same master nothing divides them either in flesh or in spirit they are in very truth two in one flesh and where there is but one

flesh there is also but one spirit they pray together they worship together they fast together instructing one another encouraging one another strengthening one another side by side they visit God's church and partake of God's banquet and presumably he's referring there to the Lord's table side by side they face difficulties and persecution share their consolations they have no secrets from one another they never shun each other's company they never bring sorrow to each other's hearts now especially that last phrase anybody who's married knows that there are struggles in marriage and sometimes we do hurt our spouse and it may indicate that this is an ideal that he's setting before the church and believers who read this but nonetheless it's a marvelous indication of what Christian marriage

was viewed as and held in high regard within a couple of hundred years this ideal of marriage would start to slip we'll have occasion to note that and during the middle ages Christian marriage was not held in as high regard by as it was in the early church and the state of celibacy becomes the pathway of discipleship if you're really wanting to be a full all out Christian this is quite clear it's very different very very different His wife died not long after their marriage we know that as well and by the time that Tertullian becomes a Montanist his wife was no longer living and there is a good indication as we'll see in a minute that Tertullian's embrace of Montanism was intimately linked to the Montanist emphasis that if your spouse dies you cannot remarry it is sin to remarry and it

could very well be that that appealed to Tertullian but we'll see that in a minute one of the big questions is why he becomes a Montanist one answer is this question about his wife dying and remarriage another thing and this comes out all through his writings is he was very interested in ethics and he is what we would describe today as a rigorous when it comes to ethics he likes things black and white and the Montanists also like things black and white and I think that one of the things that attracted Tertullian to Montanism was not so much the prediction of the end he doesn't refer to that much it was not so much the the sort of prophesying but it was the strong ethical stance the Montanists were making in a number of areas now there's two areas then that we want to look at with

Tertullian on his Montanism one is the issue of martyrdom Tertullian's writing career can be divided into two segments the year 190 to about 205 is when he is for lack of a better word orthodox when he is writing treatises from within the church from the year 206 to 215 the last ten years of the life we know of him about he is writing as a Montanist and he's critical of the church and he writes a number of books in which he is criticizing the church's position in certain areas for instance the issue of martyrdom when persecution takes place what should you do as a Christian? do you voluntarily go down as it were to the police station and give yourself up and say I'm a Christian or do you flee? is it ever right to flee from persecution? if you know the authorities have a warrant for your

arrest can you go into hiding? the church's answer based on Matthew 10.23 was that if you are actually arrested for your faith then you have to give a good witness and be prepared to suffer the consequences

but that doesn't mean that you cannot flee from persecution Matthew 10.23 when you are persecuted these are our Lord's words when you are persecuted in one town flee to the next and based on that text the large numbers of church writers said if you are aware that you are about to be arrested and you can go into hiding go into hiding and they were critical of Christians there were some Christians who this happened I can actually I haven't given you any text but I can show you text in which there might be a Roman century roughly a hundred men marching through a town and suddenly out of a

doorway will come a man running yelling I'm a Christian arrest me and there are a couple of passages like that and now looking back we might say well the people are obviously disturbed and the church though is responsible this is not appropriate behavior this is not what believers should be doing they should not be provoking the authorities to execute them and murder them Tertullian's response to that as he looked to the church what he saw was you're lax and Tertullian's answer should you ever flee from persecution his answer is simple it's black and white no never he actually has a book called Flight in Time of Persecution and if you turn over the page there is a quote from it the third page of the notes there Flight in Time of Persecution a significantly sized book and this is from

chapter 9 and section 4 yet who will flee persecution from persecution if not the man who fears and who will fear if not the man who loves not if you ask counsel of the spirit in other words if you ask what the spirit would say what he approved what will he approve more than counsel of the spirit indeed by it almost all are advised to offer themselves or martyrdom never to flee from it hence I cannot help but quote it as follows and now he quotes it's a bit of a different translation he quotes the saying number 4 if I recall correctly there you go back you look back at number no number 3 what he's quoting here it's a bit of a different translation is statement number 3 this is where we actually get statement 3 from we get it from Tertullian hence I cannot help but quote it as follows if

you are held up to infamy that is good he who does not suffer ignore me before men will know it before God never be ashamed because it is your very righteousness that sets you before the public gaze why are you ashamed of what is to your glory you gain power when you are before the eyes of men and then he quotes number 4 so he also tells us elsewhere do not then ask to die in bridal beds or in miscarriages or from gentle fevers rather seek to die a martyr that he may be glorified and suffer for you now there's a couple of things very disturbing about this passage first of all he's quoting these texts on the level of scripture it's quite clear that for Tertullian these are authoritative statements and the whole language in which he's quoting them is the way a Christian would quote

scripture and there are cases where you can quote a text and while proof texting is not always the best way to discuss and do theology there are times there are issues where there is a clear text and the context supports it where you can quote the text and the case is closed in one sense and he quotes these passages here as if they were scriptures they close the case for him the second thing that is disturbing is that it runs against the grain of a number of scripture passages our Lord's words in Matthew 10 there Paul's own situation for instance in the book of Acts Acts 19 the riot in Ephesus Paul wants to go into the arena 24,000 25,000 men screaming great is Diana of the Ephesians for two hours straight and Paul says to a number of his friends let me go into the arena and obviously

with the hope that he'd be able to calm the crowd down and some of the authorities of Ephesus send words to him don't let him go in now if Tertullian had been there what would he have said to Paul go in Paul you get martyred that's to your glory but Paul doesn't Paul listens and he doesn't go in now we know from later church history of later scriptures 2 Timothy and some scriptural accounts outside of the word of

God that Paul did die a martyr now he was not afraid ultimately God giving him strength to lay down his life for Christ but there is a difference between martyrdom as it were according to the gospel martyrdom that God is genuinely leading you into and plain foolishness and throwing your life away and Tertullian seems to be recommending here the latter the second area and there

are a number of areas that's an ethical issue that's an ethical issue as Tertullian looks at the church he's afraid that maybe some believers are growing lax and what he's trying to do is encourage a spirit of boldness in the face of Roman authorities but in doing so he goes further than scripture the second area and these are only two of a number of areas we could cite the second area has to do with marriage is it legitimate if your spouse dies to remarry well I'm sure if you know the writings of the Apostle Paul you know the answer to that 1 Corinthians 7 Paul deals with it right at the end of the chapter as he's been dealing with issues relating to divorce and separation issues dealing with relations to men who have the responsibility and again remember from last week the context of

the Middle East or the ancient empire being patriarchal men who have the responsibility of securing husbands for their daughters right at the end of the chapter he talks about those who are widowed can they remarry and Paul says yes by all means and in the Lord he emphasizes well Tertullian had problems now and the Montanites had problems now and let me read the text and then comment on it it's number 2 there right after to his wife and it's a text called On Monogamy and he's not dealing here with the issue of that's what the book is called On Monogamy but he's not dealing with the issue of marrying only one wife as opposed to polygamy he's dealing with the issue of is it legitimate for a Christian to remarry after the death of the spouse he's not dealing with the issue of divorce and

remarriage he's dealing with that one specific issue On Monogamy We however who are deservedly called the spiritual he's talking about the Montanites because of the spiritual gifts which acknowledgedly are ours consider that continence is as worthy of veneration as freedom to marry is worthy of respect since both are according to the will of the creator continence honors the law of marriage permission to marry tempers it the former is perfectly free the latter is subject to regulation the former is a matter of free choice the latter is restricted within certain limitations we admit but one marriage just as we recognize but one God therefore the first point we must take up in our consideration the subject at hand is whether or not it is possible that the paraclete the spirit has revealed

anything at all which is an innovation opposed to Catholic tradition the word Catholic there used at this period in time let me just veer off very quickly is a good word the word means universal and it has down through the years centuries I don't need to tell you it's been appropriated by one communion or community but the word Catholic is a good word and I can affirm without any hesitation that I belong to one holy Catholic apostolic church not a visible church not rooted in any institution but is all the body of God's people throughout space and time the word Catholic Catholicos is universal and so he's talking here about universal tradition all which imposes moral obligations upon us as inconsistent with the life burden referred to by the Lord the Lord himself has spoken personally on

both these subjects for he says I have yet many things to speak to you but you cannot bear them now when the Holy Spirit is come he will introduce you to all truth thus, of course he sufficiently indicates that the Holy Spirit reveals such things as may be considered innovations since they were not revealed before and burdensome since it was for this reason that they were not revealed the paraclete has many things to teach which the Lord deferred until such time as he should come it is by a predetermined plan that this is done first he will bear witness to the selfsame Christ in whom we place our faith and to the whole design of

God's creation and he will glorify him and bring to mind the things that he has said and when thus he is recognized according to the plan which was determined

from the beginning then will make known the many things which have to do with the way of life we are to follow these things will be authenticated by the integrity of his teaching they may be new because they are revealed only now they may be burdensome because up to now they were not required of us nevertheless the author is the very same Christ who said that he had yet many other things which the paraclete should teach things which would be found no less a burden by men of our own day than by those who in his day could not bear them now the whole argument there centers around John 16, 12-13 and his interpretation of that verse is very different from Irenaeus for Irenaeus that verse was fulfilled in the apostles they were the ones whom God led into all truth and where is that truth now it

is scripture and therefore the spirit's work by implication is different in the church after the end of the apostolic period than in the apostolic period in the first century one of the things the spirit is doing is he is inspiring what we call the New Testament after the New Testament period he is illuminating it he is opening it up he is giving a love for it he is giving a desire to follow his teachings he is giving knowledge of it and so on Tertullian's understanding of that passage is that this passage refers to things the spirit will teach yet they are not in scripture but they are just as binding things that come after the period of scripture and one of them Tertullian said is the fact the spirit is now telling us we cannot remarry after the death of our spouse and when his opponent

said what you do with 1 Corinthians 7 39 to 40 I haven't given you this passage but in this book on monogamy Tertullian's response is that was only for that season the spirit now has superseded it just as our Lord superseded Moses teaching on divorce well I hope you see this opens a huge can of worms anybody can come along and say the spirit is now teaching me this the spirit now requires us to do this and what you have then for the monsonist this is very important what you have for the monsonist the canon of scripture is open last week we looked at the Gnostics and the Gnostics wanted to boil scripture down the New Testament when they wanted to they didn't want to recognize the Old Testament as God's word and they wanted to reduce the New Testament some of them like Martian to Luke the

Gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul they wanted to reduce canon they're only they're the same period as this in other words on the right hand side or the left hand side whatever you want to say you've got the church fighting the Gnostics who want to cut the canon down and actually want to add some of their own books like the Gospel of Thomas and so on and on the other side you've got these monsonists and they want to open the canon up and the the spirit is giving fresh words and these words are authoritative now it could also be and well one has to ask when you read Tertullian's writings he has a very high view of the word of God you might you might think well how could he do this but he does and I could take you to a number of them well you can say when the spirit has spoken in

Scripture it is enough what more can be said and then we see him doing this now if I were trying to understand why Tertullian finds himself in this position one could look at it a number of ways one could look at it maybe psychologically and say he was so devoted to his wife that he couldn't envision usually of the women not the men but usually the women a little phrase called univera u-n-i-v-i-r-a univera and it's one of the greatest compliments Roman culture could give to a woman which is that she was the wife of one man even after he died she remained faithful so to speak to his memory in other words what I think is going on with Tertullian is he is he's brought his culture with him and his culture is shaping the way he interprets the word of God but this passage here of John 16 is

very disturbing because it opens the door and no wonder the church found itself having to stand firm against this sort of teaching one final point and that is this that God sometimes writes straight lines with crooked pens God writes straight lines with crooked pens there's enough of Tertullian at the end of his career that's crooked and yet it is this man as a mountainist in the year 209-210 writes a book called Against Praxeus which is one of the most eloquent defences of the doctrine of the Trinity in which he argues Praxeus was a man who believed sometimes what you find today in congregations even evangelical congregations Praxeus believed that there was one God and that the three persons were not really persons they were different roles the one God took on at certain points he was

the father when he created he was the son when he died he was the spirit of Pentecost and so on almost like masks the one actor would put on in other words the persons were not genuine persons one God but not genuine persons I sometimes heard this and you may well have heard the same and I suspect that teaching by the way is called modalism and it's wrong I sometimes heard this and I confess it it upsets me when I hear it but I know generally the people saying it really don't know what they're saying I sometimes heard it when people are praying and they thank God the Father for dying for them the Father did not die for us the Son did and there is a distinction of persons that must be maintained and Tertullian writes against Praxis and it is he who all basically comes up with what becomes

the classical way of talking about the Godhead who is the God that we worship as believers he is one God yet three persons three persons yet they share one being and if you respond how can that be?

I mean it's a mystery well if we could fully understand God he would not be God God is in his essence mystery he has revealed much about himself there's no way you can read the scriptures without I'm talking here about the New Testament without seeing very clearly that the one who is proclaimed as the Lord Jesus Christ is God fully fully God both in his work and his person and his nature there's to me no other honest way of reading the New Testament and of making sense of all of the texts that deal with the person of the Son fully God and yet the great cry of Israel hear O Israel the Lord our God is one we as Christians believe in one God yet one who is free and it's Tertullian who comes up with one God in three persons or one being in three persons it's Tertullian also who coins the word

Trinita which is the word Trinity and so that's what I mean that God can sometimes write straight lines with crooked pens now very quickly just as we close what can we draw from this study what was the influence ultimately of monsonism well one of the areas it split churches it divided churches those who accepted the monsonist prophecies as genuine and those who did not some churches it led them to begin to cut back the canon because the monsonists used the book of John regularly you can see it here with Tertullian some churches said maybe John's gospel shouldn't be in the canon and so there were some negative effects of this controversy there were two positive effects very positive effects first of all the doctrine of the Trinity no doubt there's no doubt as you read Tertullian he is a

he is a key figure in not in elaborating what the new testament teaches on this truth very important truth and he's a key figure the other thing is it raises the question of the canon it forced the church to grapple with that issue which books are in the canon why is it closed it is closed the church knows that the church knows it can't be adding these monsonist prophecies on but why on the next week you might think well logically this would be the time to move into that but I'm going to leave it until next week there's a reason for me leaving it until next week and we're going to break here and in the next hour we're going to look at Constantine but maybe we should take very quickly some questions before we break five minutes we have maybe five minutes for some questions yes there are

some the so called French prophets in the 18th century they are descendants of the Huguenots they're one that immediately comes to mind there probably there might have been groups in the 19th century as well but yeah I think there would have been some before the 20th century who would have affirmed yes monsonism was a solid movement the question I haven't dealt with I should have actually for the mic I should have given the other question but the question was when did the worship of Mary, the saints and the use of images in churches come in a lot of that well all of that would be post probably mid fifth century and so you're dealing with a period after the fall of the empire increasingly illiterate and when the sort of connections that the church had had with each other in the time of the

Roman empire were falling apart many churches were isolated it's as you move into the middle ages in other words yeah the question was did the worship of Mary wasn't attached to the use of the term Theotokos which is mother of God yes in the mid 400's there is a great debate about the person of Christ how can he be fully God fully man and there is a term that is coined originally to speak of his deity that mother is the mother of that Mary rather is the mother of Jesus and an affirmation that Jesus is God and therefore by implication the argument was that Mary is the mother of God but once you start using that phrase it opens again that doorway to putting her elevating her in a position that the new testament doesn't ascribe to her two more questions and then we'll break basically by the

early 200's it's effectively dealt with but it remained a problem well into the 400's there are monstrous congregations into the 400's the question has to do with what did Tertullian regard with the permanence of the soul as far as I know Tertullian believed in the immortality of the soul in fact Tertullian actually believed the soul had a material shape similar to in some way that was passed down not only the physical genes that produced your physical body but the soul actually also had a physical shape and that's also interesting because he gets into the monstrous issue at that point too he actually claims that a sister in one of the churches actually had a vision in which he saw a soul with an actual shape and colour and he cites the passage as proof he cites that prophecy as proof

that the soul must have a shape so I would I'm pretty positive that he thinks the soul is immortal well that's one of two other questions and I know that we need to break we can pick them up at the end of the next hour if that's convenient so we'll break down for ten minutes and we want to look at the revolution that takes place and I use that word very broadly the revolution that takes place in the fourth century when Constantine embraces Christianity and basically recognizes it as a legal religion now church historians and Christian authors when they think about Constantine usually think of him along one or two lines John Edwards who we began with last time when he thought about Constantine he could talk about Constantine's great revolution and he could talk of it in very positive terms

that it was a putting down of Satan that Satan's power which had been displayed in the persecutors of the empire suddenly is defeated and put down and John Edwards looked on the reign of Constantine very positively more typical though is the following remarks of John Wesley in a sermon he preached called the mystery of iniquity he said the greatest blow ever struck at the root of genuine Christianity was struck in the fourth century by Constantine when he called himself a Christian and he poured in a flood of riches honors and power upon the Christians then the mystery of iniquity was no more hidden but stopped abroad in the face of the sun then not the burden but the iron age of the church commenced now we could spend time and very interestingly enough because both Edwards and Wesley are

contemporaries and why would they read this event so differently but we want to focus on the event itself the question that I'm wanting to answer in this lecture is Constantine friend or foe to the church and my

answer is going to be ambiguous and I don't think it's an easy and contrary maybe to Tertullian who maybe could have answered it black or white I don't think it's an easy question to answer and it teaches us that often historical questions are not as clear cut as we might like them to be at least in our limited perspective and not being able to see all the factors at work I want to take you back though before we look at the career of Constantine I want to take you back into the second century Tertullian the end of Tertullian's career we know is around 215 some later writers say

that he ended as a martyr we don't know that for certain but in the third century and that's where Tertullian's writing is in the beginning of that period the third century was a period of tumult for the empire a period of anarchy and confusion between the reign of Caracalla who died in the year 211 and the reign of Diocletian who came to power in 284 in other words in the space of about 70 years there were 20 emperors you can do the arithmetic as to how long each of them probably reigned 20 emperors in a space of about 70 years only two of them died in their beds the rest of them were murdered assassinated killed in palace revolts or died on the battlefield that sort of track record should give you some indication what is going on in the empire you compare it to the previous century

between the year 96 when Nerva becomes emperor and the 180s when Marcus Aurelius dies in the space of 90 years there are 5 emperors that's the golden age of the outward and political machinery that was the golden age the third century was a period of chaos the frontiers of the empire this massive institution stretched from northern England all the way over to the Persian gulf that went as far south as the Sahara and as far north as the German forests the frontiers were punctuated again and again in the third century by barbarian invasions German troops German tribes coming down from the area we call Germany today puncturing the frontier very quickly because of their use of cavalry and the Romans didn't use cavalry at this period as extensively and raiding deep into the empire in the east

Rome finding herself fighting against an empire called the Parthian empire losing often in those battles probably the greatest defeat was when the emperor of Valerian was captured by the Parthians taken back by the Parthian king imprisoned died in prison and the Parthian king has him stuffed as you would stuff an animal and sticks him in the corner of his palace as a reminder of his victory over the Romans and the Roman empire the during the third century is in a period of great anarchy pirates who had not been on the Mediterranean for close to 200 years suddenly reappear Julius Caesar had rid the Mediterranean of pirates suddenly they appear roads beset by robbers and wars all across the empire rampant inflation and in many respects the collapse it appeared of the empire historians often

have asked why did the empire not fall in the third century why in the west at least did it hang on for another 200 years well the answer to that from a historical vantage point is the man named Diocletian D-I-O-C-L-E-T-I-A-N army man rises up through the ranks and becomes the emperor in a coup in the year 284 he'd been living at the time and he thought just another one in a long line but he was to reign 21 years it was not that long but it was long enough for him to reform many areas of the empire to bring economic reform to bring military reform to convince the other army generals they needed to beef up the army and they needed to put a lot of money and effort into cavalry it was he who brought governmental reform he realized the empire was too big to govern and what he did was he split

it down the middle a line running down from the central alps down through the Adriatic down into North Africa and the west was governed by an emperor and the east was governed by an emperor and joint decisions were made by both emperors and each of them had a co-emperor or a vice-emperor below them so that they could have a smooth transition of power and he called the emperor actually of both the

east and the west the Augustus and the co-emperor was called the Caesar in other words he recognized there needed to be a peaceful transition of power there needed to be some sort of more hands-on control of the various parts of the empire this was actually a very historic division because it would be that area west of that dividing line that would fall in the 400s and be submerged beneath

various barbarian kingdoms the east would continue for another thousand years the one area of reform though that proved to be a failure was religious reform in the east he was obviously the Augustus the emperor of the east he chose as his co-emperor or Caesar a man named Galerius in the west by the way it was a man named Maximian who was the Augustus an army general who was fervently loyal to Diocletian and Maximian chose as his Caesar a man named Clor Constantius the father of Constantine Clor meant pale face in the west in the east then Diocletian had as his co-emperor Caesar this man called Galerius and Galerius had a deep abiding hatred of Christians and at some point he convinced Diocletian that there needed to be added to these other reforms religious reform that the problem one

of the deepest problems of the empire was the growth of the church by this period of time 10-12% of the empire was Christian 6-7 million believers in the empire and he convinced Diocletian that this was a major major problem and they had to stamp the church out once and for all and so in the year 303 there is issued an edict which starts what is known as the great persecution it runs at least in the east to the year 312 and it is brutal Eusebius of Caesarea who observed it said that in places like Egypt and Palestine the execution of believers went on hour after hour after hour they dispensed with killing them in the amphitheaters anymore and Eusebius he was an eyewitness he said that he saw men beheading believers hour after hour day after day week after week the toll was horrific of

martyrs in the east and Diocletian then on the advice of Galerius launches himself into this war against the church two years later Diocletian did an act that was never done before and never done after he resigned from being emperor and he had told Maximian that when he stepped down in the east he had to step down in the west and their Caesars or co-emperors would become the Augusti or Augustuses and therefore the emperors and they would appoint new Caesars there would be a peaceful transition of power Maximian apparently went kicking and screaming he didn't want to give it up but he had agreed to do this beforehand when Diocletian appointed him and Diocletian retired to look after turnips and cabbages in a palace he had built in what is now Yugoslavia a place called Split on the Adriatic

quite an unheard of act to give up all this immense power and to go back to common life as it were Galerius in the east becomes the emperor and he picks up the tempo of persecution in the west the emperor is the father of Constantine Constantius and he stops the persecution completely in the east it rages on and it will rage on up to the year 312 in the year 311 Galerius will fall ill he has cancer and in an incredible move he stops the persecution and he asks the church to pray for his healing quite an incredible event that takes place he would subsequently die in the west though the persecution stopped after two years when Diocletian retired Maximian went Constantius becomes the emperor and he stops the persecution a year later in the year 306 Constantius is dead and his legions in the

city of York in England you can still go to York and I've been there and you can stand beside a wall that was built in the time of Constantine where his legions of Constantius Chlorus declared Constantine emperor now there was a man sitting in Milan who was supposedly to move into that position a man named Severus but Constantine and this is one feature of his personality that needs to be taken into account was a man who was groomed for power his father groomed him for power one writer a man named Timothy Barnes who teaches at the Classics Department at the University of Toronto has

described Constantine as implacably ambitious he was a man who wanted power and although he was not in line he was not the Caesar to his father and this man Severus was he took what his legions acclaimed him

as and he declared himself the emperor of the west and over the next six years he becomes the emperor in not only name but indeed and probably the key event is his march on the city of Rome and one of the bridges across the Tiber River in the year 312 the Battle of the Milvian Bridge where quite amazingly at least to many of his army generals who are mostly pagans the army was a major holdout of Roman paganism to his army generals he tells them before the battle they have to put on their shields and banners a Christian symbol the Chi Rho symbol a very ancient Christian symbol which was the intertwining of the first two letters in Greek of the name of Christ the Chi the CH and the looks like a P in Greek but the R and it was an ancient symbol you have the X which is the CH and the P which is

the R going up through it it's a very very old symbol used on cutlery used on plates that have been found in the third century to identify the owners of homes as Christians and this sign Constantine puts on the shields and banners of his troops as they go into battle identifying himself publicly with Christianity many years later Eusebius of Caesarea will actually interview Constantine in Palestine and ask him why did you do that and Constantine said many years later that the he was committed suicide by riding in his full armor down into the Tiber River and drowning Constantine was the emperor in the west not only in name but in power over the next twelve years he'll reconquer the whole of and as I mentioned there are those who have looked at Constantine he's an astute politician yes he

is an astute politician he was greedy for power yes he wanted power no doubt about the features of his personality and therefore some historians will argue from that and say well it's obvious then the man was using Christianity to gain control of the empire just a front just a shield and so on my reading is very different and I must publicly mention that my reading of Constantine has been largely shaped by a man named Timothy Barnes I just mentioned him who teaches in the classics department at the University of Toronto who has written a book called Constantine and Eusebius in which he basically grapples with this question and he said we can look at the consequences of Constantine's actions 100, 200, 300 years later and so on and read it back therefore because the consequences many of

them were bad he must have not been genuine but he said that's not the right way to do history the right way to do history is to read the documents that come from Constantine himself or in his case look at the legislation and I want to now look at some of the legislation that Constantine issued and I want you to try to I'm not sure where you're coming from in this question it's a very important question and increasingly I'm convinced that the decision of Constantine to legalize Christianity had effects that are still major effects that are still with us and one of the great questions for is the figure who kind of opens the whole sluice gate and we're living with the consequences still today and so probably you may have an opinion one way or the other but I want you to kind of hang that in

suspension I want you to follow along this series of legislation and ask what is it that would impel a man to make these laws what kind of convictions would he have to have 313 almost his first edict was to legalize Christianity Christianity was no longer to be persecuted it was to be a legal religion you need to remember that the the power base of Constantine is the Roman aristocracy and the old army generals and most of them are pagan the aristocracy and especially the army generals is a bastion of paganism and Constantine must have known the previous history of the previous century when there were coups and revolts regularly and he must have known that by legalizing Christianity he was going against the religious

convictions of most of his army generals and he was risking a coup why

would he do that granted Christianity about 10% maybe 12 maybe if you want to and there were parts of the empire where it was much higher than that some small areas but still overall it's only about 10 12 maybe 15% liberal estimate what politician in such a context would throw his lot in with 15% and that not a great influential percentage in the United States we've seen some of the political goings on over the last 25 30 years in which the evangelical right has sought to win significant clout in the through the republican party but there we're dealing with a much larger percentage we're dealing with a significant block of the voters 25 30% in parts of the south even higher we're not dealing with anything like that and we're not dealing with the powerful in society we're dealing with

slaves and some upper class but not a lot secondly he proceeded to donate huge amounts of money to build a splendid basilica in Rome to build what is the foundation of the Vatican today a church that would accommodate 4000 worshippers third he gave money regularly to support the poor orphans widows this is not Roman emperors didn't do this the poor deserved what they had they were not to be supported by the states he made Christian bishops and we need to come back to this issue of bishops when we come to the rise of the papacy but we'll pass it by this point he made Christian bishops and pastors exempt from taxation nobody has ever been exempt from taxation except for the emperor's personal family not even the praetorian guard his own personal bodyguards they all were taxed why would he

give a tax break to pastors and Christian leaders it's something that stayed with us till today he allowed bishops to set up episcopal courts this is a very very significant event if you had a problem with your neighbor and your neighbor was a Christian and you were a Christian instead of having your case tried before a secular pagan judge you could take it before the bishop and have him try it this is very significant because what this means is that when the Roman Empire the governmental machinery collapses in the next century and there are no more pagan judges the judges will be the bishops and we're actually there's a union of church and state here going on which is not good but why would he do that Roman law began to be remolded he abolished one form of capital punishment crucifixion

it was abolished no other was but that was the gladiatorial games the staple of Roman entertainment for nearly 600 years was done away with overnight and he replaced it with chariot racing now chariot racing could be just as bloody at times as well and could issue riots there were a variety of teams in the Roman Empire the greens the blues and the reds there might have been another and if the greens lost they'd go on a riot the fans but nonetheless chariot racing was a lot more wholesome than gladiatorial games Sunday 321 Sunday was to be a day of rest for absolutely everybody except for farmers during farming time divorce and remarriage were made more difficult in Roman law divorce at least for men was fairly easy but it was made much more difficult there were specific reasons he gave as

to why you could divorce your wife and be eligible for remarriage and so on the Roman law also had significant fines for anybody who was not married if you were not married if you were a male between the ages of 18 and 55 and you were not married you were fined every year and the same applies to women but the ages were different and if you were married and didn't have children you were fined now you can see the reasoning the reasoning is we need children especially males for the army you find it often happening in this century in various totalitarian regimes where families have been given significant bonuses for having more children to constantly get away with all that his argument was that there are certain men and women whom God calls to a celibate life they shouldn't be fined they

should be respected or and now let me turn to two documents one of these documents is cited by Eusebius and what Professor Barnes of U of T shows is that while we can't corroborate all of Eusebius's quotations of documents when we can corroborate them he's accurate in other words when he quotes something and we have it in another source a pagan source or when we quote something and we found it in an archaeological source carved into a wall or something he's usually very accurate which gives us the assumption that when we can't corroborate it we should nonetheless trust him because when we can corroborate him he's accurate in an edict that Constantine issued in 325 he talked about previous emperors he said he despised the emperors all of them who came to form except for one his father and

why because he said they persecuted the true doctrine but he said these are remarkable statements but he said those emperors now knew better because they were in hell you have to think about it these are insights into the conviction of this man or this document and I think this document is one of the most to me persuasive it's part of a letter he wrote to the king of the Parthian empire Sapphor the first and he had no power over Sapphor and he had heard Constantine had heard that there were Christians in the Parthian empire and he told Sapphor he needed to be very careful how he treated them because he had been persecuted and then he said this I profess the most holy religion I confess that as a disciple of the holy god I observe his worship with the power of this god on my side to help

me beginning at the boundaries of the ocean that's the Atlantic everybody knew there was good Romans knew there was nothing beyond the Atlantic there was kind of a river or an ocean that surrounded all of the land beginning at the boundaries of the ocean because he began at York in 306 I have gathered every nation one after another throughout the world to the certain hope of salvation this god I worship my army is dedicated to him wears his sign on their shoulders marching directly wherever the cause of justice summons them I confess I honor this god who has never dying remembrance this god in the height of his glory I delight to contemplate with a pure and simple heart now I don't think you can read a text like that he's writing to somebody over whom he has no political power at all and

basically telling him you have to be very careful what you do to Christians in that land because this god they worship is my god and he has given me dominion over the entire empire and you need to be very careful it's a threat no doubt about it it's a threat it issues the whole structure of threats typical of the ancient world kings throwing back threats and fighting against each other but he's got no power of this man in other words as I look at text like that and there are others I could give you but as I look at text like that as I look at legislation that we've gone through what I see is was a man who believed that god had raised him up to Christianize the Roman empire and it was in that conviction that he went into that battle in the Milvian bridge that somewhere prior to that battle

he had come to some sort of profession of faith or commitment now I'm not necessarily saying I'm convinced he was a genuine believer I have no idea about that but the evidence to me dictates he thought he was he believed that he had been specially appointed by god to bring Christ to the empire now some of the ways he employed military means we've raised lots of questions about which reply back to maybe the genuineness of his faith but I don't know about that the issue of the genuineness of his faith but what I can see is this man believes that god raised him up to Christianize the empire in other words the question at the beginning is ambiguous I do not for a moment believe that he was using Christianity as a kind of a tool or a shield behind which there are other motives the deepest

motives I think innovating this man were religious ones when he died in 337 there was scarcely any facet of the public life of the empire that was not touched his successors would go on to make Christianity not

only a legal religion but the only religion so that by the end of the century if at the beginning of the century in 303 it was dangerous to be a Christian at the end of the century it was dangerous to be a pagan and the Christian Roman Empire in quotes is destroying evidences of Greco-Roman paganism pulling down temples destroying idols and those who were the most fervent propagators of Greco-Roman paganism in some cases actually killing them into an incredible churn of events that takes place in the 4th century the reign of Constantine and now we move away from his own personal

convictions to the results of that reign and the first result we have to see is almost overnight the church went from being persecuted to having the ear of the emperor as you find pagans complaining about the way the emperor would pull out all kinds of money to ship bishops from all over the empire from one part to the other paying for their accommodation paying for their travel and so on and suddenly these men who had been in fear of their lives are now they have the ear of the emperor and it's not surprising some of it goes to the head of some of these men and they start to talk about a Christian Roman Empire being the bowl of history and they see the church and state being intertwined and that the state as it were, the Christian state being an image of the kingdom of God and that sort

of thinking would have real problems when the empire falls in the four hundreds.

In other words, there is this union of church and state that takes place in Constantine's reign and basically it lasts down to the 19th century.

In fact, in countries like England, I mean, there is still a secular power that is the head of the church of England. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of the church of England. Now, a titular head, but still the head.

Any major decision that has to be made in the church has to go through her decision making. Now, she wouldn't refuse, but still that's a remnant of that, this union of church and state. Let me suggest long-term, and here I reveal my free church link, long-term I think it's got problems, it's got major problems.

And thus we have in the Middle Ages heretics being executed for their faith, over their convictions. And even those who I have great admiration for, some of them, men like Calvin and Luther, still living in the shadow of this, and urging the use of the sword to defend right doctrine. It's very foreign to the early church, the period we've looked at up until the 300s.

A second question, that's one result, the union of church and state, I don't think is a good result, long-term. And power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Lord Acton said those words in the 19th century in a study of the Roman Catholic papacy.

And most of us, even though we may be very devout, have a difficult time using power, and using it wisely and judiciously. That's the first thing. The second problem is, what happens when the ruler disagrees with your theological views? What happens when the emperor, in this case we're talking about, happens to be of one theological stripe, and you're of another? A number of Constantine's successors were Aryans.

We'll talk about Aryans next week. They did not believe the full deity of the sun. What happens if you did believe that Jesus was fully God, as Athanasius did? He no longer makes war openly, but he places hidden snares for us, concealing his treachery by the means of the name which his followers bear, in order that we may endure the same sufferings as our fathers, and yet not seem to suffer for Christ, since our persecutors have the name of Christian.

There's a real problem. In other words, the whole issue of heresy and orthodoxy now intertwines with the power that some have to enforce their views. Finally, and this is the third problem here, finally, as Christianity became the Roman Empire's preferred option, you find many tempted to join the Church.

Not because of conviction, but because it was a way of getting ahead in society. In other words, if now the Emperor is a Christian professor, and all of those around him are Christians, how are you going to get ahead? And thus there is that temptation to profess something you don't really believe. And thus you find an identity crisis comes into the Church.

What does it mean to be a Christian in a Christian society? And I don't want the answer to But in one sense, it is a good thing that the sort of Christian background that our culture has had is not as much with us today, because it's more clear today what it means to be a Christian. As our society moves very clearly in a more pagan direction, what it means to be a Christian what we call revival. And I think we all should.

But when that takes place, it introduces a whole series of different questions, problems. In a society that claims to be Christian, what does it mean to be a Christian? There's an identity crisis that comes upon the Church in the reign of Constantine and afterwards. Before the reign of Constantine, the dividing line between Church and paganism was clear.

After Constantine, it's not clear. The answer, and again, I have some problems with the answer, but the answer that the Church came up with, or many came up with, was monasticism. Monasticism is an answer to this question.

When everybody says they're a Christian, what does it mean to be a Christian? And before you start to think about the problems of monasticism as Luther found them and as Calvin found them in the Middle Ages, you need to reflect on the following fact, that all the great theologians of the fourth century are all either in the monastic movement or supported. Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, Augustine, all of these men are either monks, committed to a celibate lifestyle, or they support it. And the monastic movement at its beginning, I'm not talking about its end a thousand years later, but at its beginning was a renewal movement.

It was an attempt to say, this is what it means to be a serious Christian in a society where everybody now says they're a Christian. What does it mean to be a Christian? And so there are three problems that emerge from Constantine, long range problems, union of church and state, linked to that the use by the church of the sword or the arm of the state to enforce orthodoxy. And then the identity crisis which issues in monasticism.

Some people when they look at it initially think monasticism looks a lot like Gnosticism. Gnosticism is against marriage and against big asceticism. The parallels and the links are surfaced.

Monasticism arises as an answer to a very, very different question. And it arises in the 300s. Well, let me stop here.

It's 20 after nine and we have time for maybe ten minutes or so for questions. And if you want to pick up some of the remarks of the first lecture, that will be fine. The remark was Constantine's involvement in the deliberations of the Council of Nicaea and the issuing of the Nicene Creed are indicative of his religious convictions.

Yes, he would be. He doesn't have any role in the actual drawing up of the Creed, but he does want some sort of answer given to the problem raised by Arius and the struggle that was going on in the church regarding the deity of Christ. There is some evidence on coins that would argue that there is an imagery that was used by the Greek and Roman pagans with regard to the sun god that Constantine takes over.

I'm not convinced that that indicates that Constantine was syncretistic in his convictions. The imagery on the shield is quite clearly the Cairo symbol. It's not a symbol relating to the sun god.

Some of the coins have imagery. That could simply be the use of certain images that were felt to be innocent, from our perspective maybe not so, but I think as you see Constantine, the personal legislation I haven't brought out are his attacks actually on paganism. Private pagan worship he forbids.

One of the main aspects of private pagan worship was when you would have a soothsayer or fortune teller come to your home who would read the entrails of an animal. And that person was known as a haraspex and that was forbidden. If you were caught with a person like that in your home, the haraspex would be executed and your property would be forfeit and you'd be internally exiled.

Full-blown pagan worship in temples, Constantine never ruled illegal in his life because he doesn't have the power to go against it. But private pagan worship he goes against. So the indications are that I think that if he does use on his coins as he did some of the images related to like the sun god Apollo or Sol rather, Sol Invictus, it is not indicative of a sort of marriage of Christianity and this pagan cult, but it's simply using some of the images or some of the imagery.

Inevitably when you move from generally a house church context in most of the church worship services in the 2nd and 3rd century were house church, 40, 50 people to now a church service of 4,000 something of the spontaneity and freedom and informality that might have been in the smaller setting is lost and there is more of a formality that comes in. Alongside this there is a growth in a conviction of a much more hierarchical view of church leadership, which also leans that way as well. The question I have to deal with is the relationship of monasticism to the growing institutionalization of the church.

Monasticism is a response to that. Some men like Athanasius he is appalled by the way some bishops are carrying on in terms of power, in terms of wealth that Constantine gave them. So yes, it is a reaction to that.

Clerical celibacy is probably 7-800 so it is a considerable period later. Worship in the area that we call the Vatican today is very old. There are clear indications the remains go back to the 200s.

What Constantine gave was the encouragement to build a basilica. I think only the foundations of that remain today. The Vatican as we know it today is built in the late Middle Ages and by the Popes in the late Middle Ages in the 1300s, 1400s, 1500s.

The Gospel of Thomas is fairly early which is a list of sayings of Christ with very little narrative unlike our Gospels. The Gospel of Thomas has got to be about 120, 130 at the latest I would think. It might be a bit earlier.

I mean I haven't done a lot of work on the Gospel of Thomas. No, the Montanists don't have anything like that in terms of their understanding of the four-fold Gospel. They're orthodox.

They're not adding any sort of other Gospel in. None of the apocryphal Gospels are Montanists. Is that what you were asking? Yeah, none of the apocryphal Gospels like the Gospel of Thomas are Montanists.

They're all Gnostic in one way, shape, or form. December 25th is probably not, it doesn't start to gain currency until 350s, 360s, and before that there was considerable difference of opinion as to when it possibly might be. If I recall correctly, see the Clement of Alexandria origin says it's sometime in the summer, May, or something like that, or what we would identify as the summer.

In the Greek, in the Orthodox tradition, it has always been linked with Epiphany, January 6th or so. The December 25th in the West is probably not the predominant date, it's probably around the 390s, if I recall correctly. Prior to that, and this I think reflects something of the emphasis in the Gospels themselves.

The focus is on Easter, and the cross, and the resurrection, and not so much on the birth. And I think that does reflect the Gospels. And thus the celebration of Christmas was not as important as the celebration of Easter.

And I'm not disparaging remembering the incarnation. It was a Roman festival, and that is because it's very close to the shortest day of the year, and from that point on the day starts to get longer. So it was also celebrated as a Roman festival.

I confess I haven't done a lot of investigation on what kind of possibilities might exist as to when Christ was born. The Scriptures give us very little to go on. And obviously in God's providence not that important from one perspective.

One final question and then we'll close with prayer. Okay. Okay.

Okay. He had his son executed. Okay.

But it was in a context of a palace revolt. And I've not heard of that. Okay.

I didn't know about the as far as I understood he was only married once. He was baptized on his deathbed. But that was not uncommon, and that was criticized by many in the church, many of the leaders.

But it was a popular opinion that baptism, after baptism, you wanted to be baptized as close as possible to death because post-baptismal sin could not be forgiven. It was an erroneous understanding of baptism. But he was baptized on his deathbed, which would mean formal embrace of Christianity.

The point I think I made was this, that I have no idea whether he was genuine or not. And I'm not sure that that's from this vantage point a fruitful discussion. What I was pressing home was from his point of view, he had at least this profession and convictions.

Whatever it may have been the case, he thought of himself this way. And his whole career from 312 to his death can be understood in no other light. Separating from that were the results of that reign and that union of Christianity.

I know a couple of those things you mentioned, like the death of his son, his execution of his son Crispus. And one explanation for it is it's a political issue. But nonetheless there are embarrassing things there for his profession of faith.

But that's one issue which ultimately at this remove we can't determine. But what I think I would want to dispel is the common evangelical historical argument which is he was using Christianity and it was so obvious. I don't think it was obvious.

In fact I see very differently when I look at the legislation and his own public statements. One final question and then we will close. I don't have an answer for that.

One answer is given that they thought that he could unify the empire that way. His mother was Helena. Yeah, Helena was certainly also committed to Christianity and goes on this pilgrimage and claims to have found the true cross and so on.

And actually is instrumental in bringing another problem into the church which is the issue of relics. But that's another issue. But yeah, his mother is very committed.

Well obviously it's a question that can't be settled in 45-50 minutes and the church has been, historians have been debating about it for 1500 years or so. But we'll close at this point and I'll be quite willing to entertain other questions afterwards. Next week then we want to look at the Aryan controversy and the issue of the deity of the Lord Jesus and the spirit, the Trinity.

And then in the second hour the issue of the canon which a number of the talks we've looked at have raised. Let's close then in prayer. Our Father we confess that you are the sovereign Lord of history and that despite many of the twists and turns and the ups and downs that we have seen tonight you are guiding your church and you will bring glory to yourself through her pilgrimage.

And we pray that we might learn from the past and we might be wise to live in the present. And we pray now for your grace and peace to be our portion this night and throughout the week to come and always for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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