

The Roman Empire and Irenaeus of Lyons

by Michael Haykin

The Roman Empire and Irenaeus of Lyons: Exploring the early Christian witness in a pluralistic culture and the church's relationship to the Roman Empire.

Duration: 2:11:10

Scripture: John 4:14, Acts 17:11, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 2:8-9, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:1-2, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Church History", "Worldview Formation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the spread of the church and the challenges it faced, such as persecution and the rise of heresy. The church, however, overcame these obstacles and continued to advance. The preacher compares the church's expansion to a river spreading over a flat land, unstoppable and unquenchable. The sermon emphasizes the importance of one's worldview and how it shapes their interactions with society and culture.

Transcript

...lectures in the history and thought and experience of the early church. And the sheets that you've been given out basically contain my notes, as it were, of what I want to think about with you tonight. In the first lecture, looking at something of the way in which the early church sought to bear witness to its faith in a... you didn't know the way I was going to bring out the first lecture tonight, but what we're thinking about is what it was like for early Christians, early believers, to find themselves in the midst of a pluralistic culture, bearing witness to their faith in that context, but also a culture that was somewhat hostile to that faith.

And so we want to think about something of the early Christian witness, its shape, the response of the culture to that witness, and then the counter-response of the church to the way that their society treated them, at least for the first 300 years. In the second lecture, we want to think about something internal to the church and the way in which the church had to struggle, if you want to use that phrase, on a different front. We can think in the first lecture of external pressure, external attack, if you want to use that phrase, on the church.

In the second lecture, we think of the struggles within the church as the church has to grapple with the nature of what is Christian truth and at what point do certain thoughts and patterns of thinking go beyond the bounds of Christian truth. Are there areas of thought in which you move beyond the pale of what we call Christian thinking, Christian orthodoxy, and so on, and the struggle is known as the Gnostic struggle, in which the early church had to face an area of very, very important truth. But the first lecture, and then I

have a series of texts after that, actually one text, the letter to Diognetus, which we're going to use a little in the first lecture.

This is the sort of format that we'll do week by week, lecture notes that basically give you an outline of what I want to do and where I'm going, and then a text or more in which we actually look at primary sources from the period. The epistle to Diognetus' date, as we will see, is around 177 to 200. Now, when our Lord was born and when the early church came into existence, the context, the larger political and social context, is what we know as the Roman Empire.

And a few remarks are probably needed to kind of put the larger context in some sort of framework. The Roman Empire occupied at the time, or dominated at the time, probably a fifth of the world's population. Somewhere around 70, maybe as many as 18 million, found themselves ruled by those whom we know as the Roman Emperors.

The first Roman Emperor was Augustus Caesar. He came to power in 27 BC, would reign to 14 AD. He came to power after a century of civil war had split apart what historians know as the Roman Republic.

During the 200 years prior to the birth of Christ, Rome had expanded at a tremendous rate to gobble up most of the country bordering the Mediterranean. So that by the time of our Lord's birth, they could call the Mediterranean Mare Nostrum, our sea. But that incredible imperial expansion had brought massive internal problems to the Roman Republic.

And in the century prior to the birth of Christ, the old way of governing the Republic by an aristocratic elite based on the Roman Senate was no longer able to govern as a number of very powerful army generals, probably the most famous being Julius Caesar, began to think and use their allegiance to basically say that we know a much better way to govern the Empire basically by military rule. That long century of civil war comes to an end of Augustus Caesar who introduces really what the Romans would later describe as Pax Romana, a period of unprecedented peace to the Mediterranean region where for at least 200 years down to the late 100s there was substantial peace for those peoples dominated by Rome bordering the Mediterranean countries. And there are today testimonies in mostly stone of the extent of the Roman Empire.

In the north, you would have Hadrian's Wall, that wall that was strung across one of the narrowest parts of Great Britain built to keep the ferocious Picts out of Northern England. In the south, one can go all the way down to the Sahara or over into Mesopotamia. And throughout this entire region, Mesopotamia being what is now modern Iraq and a portion of Iran.

And throughout this entire region, Romans left mute testimonies as it were to their presence. Roman roads. About a month and a half ago, I was in England and driving over what was, at least its basis, was a Roman road.

It's the A1, which a portion of it is actually now the M1 but the A1 was originally a Roman road. Very straight, the Romans built very straight roads. Or again in England, a place that I've been to, not recently but about 10 years or so ago, Bath, where you have the complex of Roman baths built over hot springs.

An incredible complex that still is, people don't use it for bathing today obviously, but it's still functional. Or one could go to Lyon, southern France, where there are still remains of the aqueducts, four aqueducts that were built by Roman engineering to bring fresh water into that city to supply the various suburban villas

that were built around the outskirts of that city. Many of them have been unearthed today, containing incredible mosaics.

All of these are testimonies to Roman might and Roman engineering. Now socially, politically I should add that Rome was a dictatorship. Any sort of semblance of republican government, any sort of democracy, and there has been some semblance of that, at least for the aristocracy during the Republic, came to an end when Augustus Caesar established himself as first citizen.

There was a pretense made that things hadn't really changed, but it was very obvious to those who knew that Rome had made the transition to a military dictatorship. And so politically, Rome is a military dictatorship, all through the history of the early church. Socially, Rome was dominated by, or the empire was dominated by, a small two percent who were wealthy, who we would describe as the upper class.

Stupendously wealthy. Augustus Caesar, for instance, had as his own personal farm the entirety of Egypt. He had taken it from Mark Antony in Cleopatra at the end of that long period of civil war.

Took a fancy to it. Also, it was a very wealthy producing area in terms of it became the breadbasket of the empire. And he decided to keep it under his personal control, operated his own personal farm.

But up and down through central Italy there were farms of stupendous magnitude. One thinks of, for instance, a farm in southern Italy which ran a sheep operation of 250,000 sheep. That's an enormous amount of sheep for one farming operation.

And so there was a small percentage of the Roman Empire who were enormously wealthy, about two percent. About eight percent, historians estimate, what we would describe today as the middle class. The rest lived either as slaves, fifty percent of the empire were slaves, or they lived on what we would describe as the subsistence level, they were in poverty.

And so there is an incredible amount of social inequity in the empire. And the church, as it begins to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God and the person of Christ, would find it drawing its main number of adherents, not surprisingly, from the lower class, from those who had nothing in this world and probably would never have anything, although there was a remarkable amount of social mobility in the empire. You could start your life off as a slave and end up among the aristocracy.

And that did happen. It didn't mean that you were able to get rid of the kind of social stigma that attached to you, but you could end up playing host at dinner parties to some of the wealthiest families and you had started your life as a slave. That happened.

There was an incredible social mobility, at least compared to other ancient civilizations, the Greeks, for instance. If you started life as a slave, you ended life as a slave, and there was no way of ever getting out of that context and moving up the social ladder. But it's not surprising, as the Church begins to proclaim the Gospel, that those who are first attracted to it are slaves in the lower class, those who have nothing in this world and for whom the Gospel opened up a rich kingdom to come.

We should also mention, and I don't want to go into this in any great detail, that it was a patriarchal culture. It was a man's world in many respects. Now, one needs to be very careful about evaluating the evidence of the ancient world and not seeing it as kind of a flat society.

Greek women had a much rougher time than Roman women. Greek women basically lived lives much as you would find today in a very fundamentalist Islamic society. A respectable Greek woman would never go out without a veil.

She would never eat her meals with anybody but her own immediate family. Her own personal quarters were almost like a secluded area of the house which male members of the immediate family alone were allowed access to. Roman women were very different.

They could eat their meals and did eat their meals with men who were not of their immediate family. They did go out without veils. They did exercise a fair amount of power in their own way, but nonetheless it's still a very patriarchal culture.

Roman males had the power of life over their slaves, which was on occasion exercised. The power of life and death. They had the power of life and death over their children.

At birth the child would be brought to the head of the Roman house, the man, and he would pronounce whether or not he would live or not. And Romans, and the Greeks as well, were much into what we've described today as child exposure. Abortion existed in the ancient world, but it was very crude.

It often produced the death of the mother. And so one of the ways in which the Romans sought to deal, for a variety of reasons, with unwanted children was the exposure of children, where they would be taken out, laid in the streets, or as more frequently put, put on rubbish heaps at the edges of the large urban centers. And Roman males had the power of life and death over their wives, although we do not know, at least I'm not aware of an instance where this was actually exercised.

But technically, legally, a Roman male could kill his wife and not be taken to court for it. And so it's very much a patriarchal world. And so it's a world of social inequities, a very small percentage, enormously wealthy.

It's a world in which it is a military dictatorship. There is a fairly extensive secret service that the emperor maintains. It's a patriarchal world.

It's a multicultural world. The Roman Empire embraced a huge number of peoples, not only Romans and Greeks, but Carthaginians and Spaniards. And Arabs and Thracians and Celts.

And all of these were brought together under Roman rule. Welding them together was not only the Roman political structure, but also the languages. Latin was used extensively throughout the Western Europe and the Western Mediterranean.

Most people would have been bilingual in that area, being able to speak Latin in their mother tongue. In the Eastern Mediterranean, it was Greek. It's interesting to reflect that you could go from Northern England, up near Hadrian's Wall, and travel all the way over to the Persian Gulf, at least for the period of time when the Romans occupied over there.

And all you needed to know were two languages, Latin or Greek. And you could probably make your way. You look at a map of that period, of that area today, maybe English could function that way.

And you think of the number of countries you'd have to cross going by land. We're not talking about going by sea, we're talking about going by land. And the number of languages you'd have to be familiar with to

be able to make your way comfortably.

So the Romans were able to weld together this area by the use of two languages, Latin and Greek. They were also very astute in Romanising the people they conquered. When they conquered an area, they introduced their gods, and they took the gods and goddesses of the peoples they conquered.

And they started doing this back around 200 BC, whether or not it was originally a thought-out policy, or whether it had more to do, and I suspect this is more true, whether it had more to do with the Roman feel that just in case these people are onto a god or goddess that we haven't heard about, and that being exists, and they may help us along, well, we'll take their gods and goddesses. And so you find that the Romans embraced a huge number of gods and goddesses, but there was a subtle policy of Romanisation. When they conquered an area, for instance, when they conquered Gaul, the Celts, who lived in Gaul, and Celts, they're not French yet, the Franks come in with the Germanic invasions in the 400s.

The Celts had a variety of gods and goddesses the Romans didn't have, and what the Romans did was they took those gods and goddesses, but in doing so they also gave their gods and goddesses to the Celts, and through religion, and religion is often, their religion became a vehicle of extending Roman culture. And so we need to have that background, a military dictatorship, a massive social inequity, a strongly patriarchal culture, one that is multicultural and pluralistic. And some similarities, then, to today.

Now Christ, the risen Christ, in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, gives explicit instructions to his disciples about their mission, as it were. And he tells them that they are to be as witnesses in Jerusalem, and then in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And one can, I think, rightly argue that the book of Acts is the following out, or the laying out, of how that mission began to be accomplished, because the first seven or so chapters of the book of Acts are focused on Jerusalem.

And you see the disciples and the early church in Jerusalem. Everything's Jewish. The heroes, if I can use that phrase, are Jewish, and the bad guys are Jewish, those who are protagonists, and seeking to extend the witness of the church are Jewish, and the antagonists, the persecutors of the church, are all Jewish.

And then there is the death of Stephen, and persecution arises, and the church is pushed out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and is forced to bear witness now outside of Jerusalem. And that witness eventually issues in not only Jews being, the good news being shared with Jews, but also with Gentiles. And Acts chapter 10 is that marvelous chapter in which there is this leap over of the racial barrier which was so deeply ingrained in the Jewish mind of Jew and Gentile, but also in the Gentile mind.

The Jews, by nature, didn't like the Gentiles, but it also worked the other way. In Acts 10, you see the racial barrier being broken down, a very important event. Very important.

That statement by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3.28 where he says that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, is a statement that has social implications. And dealing with the Jew and Gentile question here, it forced the church to grapple with the universality of her message. That the gospel was not simply just for Jews, but was for Gentiles as well.

And you see the book of Acts is pushing that out and out and further and further. And the Apostle Paul is probably the key figure whom, at least in the book of Acts, who we see as part of that story of the gospel being taken from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and beginning to go to the ends of the earth. It's interesting that Luke spends in the book of Acts ten chapters looking at how Paul ends up in Rome.

And he's obviously telling us something. He's showing us how Acts 1.8 is carried out. The program of Acts 1.8 you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth is beginning to be carried out in the book of Acts.

Now, the church's relationship to the Roman Empire in the book of Acts is a fairly peaceful one. The problem for the church comes from the synagogue. It comes from the Jewish quarter.

It's Paul's consistent missionary strategy that he go to the synagogue first when he goes to a large urban area. I should have mentioned, by the way, that Christianity is an urban religion in these centuries. It's not without significance that the word pagan comes from the Latin word *paganus* which means country dweller.

It's obvious that that is telling us something socially. That the early church made its impact first of all in the city. Paul himself is an urban creature.

If you look at his missionary strategies that's laid out in the book of Acts and certain portions of his letters for instance Romans 15 it's quite clear that Paul focused on going to large urban centers. Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Rome. All these are big cities in the ancient world.

Rome is close to a million people at this period in time. Ephesus, 200,000. Antioch, probably similar size.

Philippi and Corinth are a bit smaller but they're still large urban centers. The church is an urban phenomenon in these early years. And the problems or the struggles that the church has in the book of Acts is not for the empire with Roman government but with the synagogue.

And probably the classic passage and let me read to you if you have a bible with you you can follow along and I'm reading out of the New Living translation is Acts 18 verses 12 through 16. Acts 18 verses 12 through 16. And this records a portion of Paul's ministry in Corinth and we read that Paul had been there about a year and a half and opposition arose from the synagogue.

Acts 18 verse 12. When Galileo became governor of Achaia some Jews arose in concerted action against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. They accused Paul of persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.

But just as Paul started to make his offense Galileo turned to Paul's accusers and said listen you Jews if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime I would be obliged to listen to you but since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish laws you take care of it. I refuse to judge such matters. From the point of view of a man like Galileo his full name actually is Lucius Junius Galileo a very important Roman official and I'll develop that in a second.

From the point of view of a man like Galileo Roman as he looks at this case that has been brought before him what he sees on the one side are Jews what he sees on the other side is also a Jew and what he hears them quarreling about is that a certain person named Jesus is the Christos or the Messiah. Now he obviously was probably speaking to both groups in Greek and that word Christos the anointed one he would have understood what the word meant but he probably never heard it before it was not a word that was used in secular circles outside of Greek speaking Jewish synagogues and as far as he's concerned this is a matter of words it's not a matter for Roman law and he dismisses the case.

Now what is significant about this incident is that Galileo was as I said a fairly highly placed Roman official governor of Achaia he was probably the most important figure Roman figure, political figure that Paul had met to that point in his life possibly not, but he probably was he was the younger brother of a man named Seneca a very well known Roman philosopher and also a man who functions as the tutor to the emperor Nero in other words a decision made by Galileo as governor of Achaia would have enormous precedent it's also interesting to note that within probably 12 years of this event Galileo would be dead having been executed by Nero but what's significant here is that in these early years of the church's existence the Roman state as it looked at the developing church as it

encountered it here and there are other places in the book of Acts where you find, in fact the last nine or so chapters is devoted to Paul's encounter with significant Roman governors like Felix and Festus and so on as the Rome looks at the church well there's quarrels going on among it's just a quarrel going on among the Jews there's nothing really that they need to be involved in all of that changes in the year 64 AD and in fact historians can date the actual days on which it changes it's the night of July the 17th into the 18th that was a period in which in July 64 AD there was what is known as the Great Fire of Rome as I said Rome was a city of about a million people 90% of the city was wood when we think of Rome today, ancient Rome we think of all the marble and stone structures

that's what lasted in the period we're looking at we're thinking of most of the city being wood packed close together apartment buildings of 15, 16 stories high and on the night of July the 17th there was a fire that broke out downtown Rome and there was a stiff wind that night and the Roman fire department fairly crude in terms of its equipment was unable to contain the fire and the fire reduced to ash about a third or so of the city before it was finally brought under control the emperor Nero was not in the city at the time he was away at one of his private villas hearing about the fire made no interest to move back to the city until he discovered that some of his own property was in danger of being burned down and he hastened back to the city and then after the fire had been brought

under control a day or so later another fire broke out and it broke out on the property of a man who was the head of the Praetorian Guard a man named Afonius Tigellinus T-I-G-E-L-L-I-N-U-S now Afonius Tigellinus was a fairly odious man at least all the Roman historians have given us any character sketch of the guy he's a fairly odious figure Nero had met him down at the amphitheater Nero for the first 8 years of his reign he had come to power in 54 after his mother Agrippina had murdered his stepfather he eventually did murder his mother as well he's an interesting character in his own right the first 8 years or so of his reign up to about 62 A.D. he was not interested in being emperor his two main passions in life were drama and horse racing he spent a lot of time down at the

amphitheater racing horses, getting to know horse breeders and so on and he meets this character Afonius Tigellinus who was a horse salesman take the liking to him and in the mid 60's when he begins to take an interest in running the empire he actually kills his mother in 62 she'd been pretty well running things Afonius Tigellinus was promoted to the head of the Praetorian Guard and the head of the Roman Imperial Secret Service and the Praetorian Guard was the elite Roman regiment who were basically supposed to guard the person of the emperor and Afonius Tigellinus as we had a time to look at his life he was a fairly odious individual carried out a reign of terror in Rome executing anybody who believed any sort of treasonable remark against the emperor so this fire breaks out on his

property about a day or two later and it's awfully fishy especially in view of the fact there are a lot of people who have heard the emperor Nero say on a number of occasions that the city of Rome really was a

ramshackle of a city it really needed to deserve the whole thing should be leveled and rebuilt in pure marble to befit his glory and it would appear that Nero got a brilliant idea that the fire could be used to do this the first fire is almost clear was a mistake it was an accident but once it had been brought under control the second fire breaks out suspiciously on the property of Afonius Tigellinus and it reduces another third of the city to ash but the rumour starts to go around that the emperor has tried to burn down the city and he realises that if it was his plan the second

fire has backfired and he needs a scapegoat and it's the Roman historian Tacitus writing about 60 years later a man from the patrician class the aristocracy a man who would access the legal documents who tells us the following and he's talking about this rumour that Nero had tried to burn the city down therefore to kill the rumour Nero substituted his culprits and punished with the utmost requirements of cruelty a class of men loathed for their vices from the crowd-styled Christus Christus, from whom they got their name had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time only to break out afresh not only in Judea, the home of the plague but in Rome itself where all the horrible and shameful

things in the world collect and find a home first of all, those who confessed were arrested then, under information, a huge multitude was convicted not so much on the grounds of incendiarism starting the fire as for hatred of the human race their execution was made a matter of sport some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts and savaged to death by dogs others were fastened to crosses as living torches to serve as lights when daylight failed Nero made his gardens available for the show and held games in the circus mingling with the crowd or standing in his chariot in charioteer's uniform hence, although the victims were criminals deserving the severest punishment pity began to be felt for them because it seemed that they were being sacrificed to gratify one man's lust for cruelty

rather than for the public welfare that is the oldest, apart from one other text that we have from a secular Roman source of the existence of the church it describes a fairly horrifying persecution what is important about the text is that it sets a precedent it sets a precedent for warfare if I can use that term between the church and state a number of things are interesting here first of all, it is clear independent attestation of the historicity, or the historic fact that there was a person who was called Christ who was crucified under the reign of in the reign of Tiberius the successor of Augustus Caesar when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea there is in the 19th Creed we'll look at it later in the lecture series there is a statement about Pontius Pilate and about Christ being

crucified in the reign of Pontius Pilate and it's a very important statement it points to the fact the early Christian message was rooted in history it's a historical message it's not something that a group of individuals have sat around and dreamt up it's not a fable or myth it has historical rootage secondly, the text indicates that Christians were disliked by many Romans because of their vices he mentions one vice here their hatred of the human race it's a surprise to read that because the core message of the early church was love and what he's obviously reflecting is the fact that Christians refused to worship the Greek and Roman gods but it was those gods who secured the welfare of the empire therefore, the typical Roman would reason who maybe didn't know Christians first hand if

these people don't worship the gods and the gods are the only way of securing the security and welfare of the empire these people must not like the empire and must not like us Romans therefore, the hatred of the human race other vices, two other charges that Christians were generally leveled were generally leveled at Christians were cannibalism and here a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper the Lord's Supper,

whatever the practice in the New Testament after the New Testament period up until around the year 300 the Lord's Supper was always done behind closed doors with people who were not yet professing believers not present the Lord's Supper was a closed event for those who were members of a local church and one could easily see how people would get the idea maybe they might hear their

friends or neighbors or if they were slaves they might hear their master and so on talking about the eating of the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ and completely misunderstanding the other charge that was frequently leveled against the church was incest cannibalism, incest hatred of the human race and tied to the hatred of the human race atheism incest was a charge because again a misunderstanding a misunderstanding of Christians calling each other brother and sister a misunderstanding of the word agape or love not a usual word used for love in the Roman Empire and the associations or misunderstandings of the Christians were into incest and always there was the typical human problem and sadly often found among Christians of believing the worst believing the worst a

willingness of if you didn't know Christians first hand a willingness to believe all kinds of scandalous rumors about them and so this is a very important precedent it sets the scene for now for what would be 250 years of persecution it's hard to believe that long not continuous not empire wide all the time but from 64 AD down to the year 312 when Christianity is declared to be a tolerated religion to become a Christian meant you had to take into consideration the distinct possibility that you would be martyred and we have a large number in the 50s or 60s of accounts of martyrs many of them written by Christians in the law courts as Christians were on trial and they're writing down remarks of the judges trying them and the responses of Christians and then the subsequent actual martyrdom

of believers and they make for very sobering reading stamps on the church the fact that she is a church of martyrs that there is something worth dying for the truth about Christ is more important than life itself and we're not going to extensively look at that during this series of lectures but it's something to bear in mind because it has been said today and all the evidence I've seen points to the truth of this that there will be more martyrs in this century for Christianity than in any of the previous centuries we live in incredible freedom and yet there are men and women who are Christians around the world today for whom a meeting like this would be utterly and completely impossible or if they did then they would be running the risk of possible death or martyrdom and one can think of

some of the very strongly fundamentalist Islamic countries where this would be the case or even countries like India where a missionary and his two children were recently burned to death by a fanatical Hindu group and so as we look at the early church it's faith and the fact of the martyrs of the early church it's not something that we want to leave behind and simply say this is just part of our history it stamps forever on the church that there are some things worth dying for there are some things more important than life itself and for us who are Christians in a fairly wealthy culture and for us who are Christians in a culture that is thankfully one in which there are rich traditions of democratic freedom we can easily lose sight of these things now we want to and I'm going to spend

about 15 minutes and then I'll draw to a close and we'll have a few questions I want to look at a document that was written in the late 2nd century called the letter to Diogenes and the church was not slow to begin to respond to persecution in a variety of ways and one of the ways was to write defenses of the faith and this is an apologetic document it's an apology an apology in the old classical sense of that word meaning a defense of the faith giving an excuse but laying out why those who believed the truth of Christianity were Christians now I haven't given you it all and we're not going to be able to write it all or even probe all of it

and so I'd encourage you to look at it when you go home and maybe later in the week but let's read a few of the texts and the first one is the first

chapter and let me call them chapters and there are little numbers within those chapters which we can call verse divisions and the first chapter lays out for us the reasons why the author is writing this letter since I perceive most excellent Diogenes that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the

religion of the Christians and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous and are making very clear that you are exceedingly zealous why the author is writing this letter Since I perceive most excellent Diogenes That you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians making very clear and careful enquiry about them both who is the god whom they trust and how they worship him so that all disdain the world and despise death that neither account those who be gods to a esteem such by the Greeks nor observe the superstition of the Jews and what is the affection which they have for one another and why it is that this new race of men or mode of living as entered into our world now and not formerly, I welcome

this eager desire in you, and I ask of God that bestows on us the power both of speech and of hearing, that it may be given to me, so to speak, that you may be edified as much as possible by your hearing, and to you, so to hear, that I by my speaking may suffer no regret." Now this translation was done back in the late 1940s, when translations were sometimes more literal than one would like.

All of that is one sentence in the original Greek, and the translator has taken it one sentence in English. We just don't write like that today, and we don't translate like that today, and so it's quite a mouthful. And what is being said here? Well, first of all, we don't know who wrote the letter.

We have no idea. It's quite clear that the Christianity is penetrating the upper classes, those who have had the opportunities of a superb education, but we don't know who wrote it. Probably in the Eastern Mediterranean, probably a natural Greek speaker, which would be in the Eastern Mediterranean.

We do know from other evidence, which I'm not going to go into, that it's written in the last quarter of the second century. Whose idea this is? We've got no idea who he is either. Scholars have written all kinds of books and articles on who this fellow might be.

One of the commonest arguments is that he was the tutor, or one of the resident philosophers, in the imperial palace of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor at the time. What we do know is that Diogenes has asked three questions, and they're very important questions. The first one is, who is the god you worship? Such that, and it's got three little subsections, such that you're not afraid to die.

And we'll see that one of the evidences that the writer gives to the truth of Christianity is the martyrs. When we think of a defense of the faith, we often think of philosophical reasons given why Christianity must be true. It's interesting how this author defends the faith, and by trying to show that yes, God is in our midst, he does so through two ways, as we will see.

One is the love we have for one another. The second is the martyrs. Who is the god you worship, Diogenes has asked, that you are not afraid to die.

You despise death. Who is the god you worship that you don't worship the Greek and Roman gods? Who is the god you worship that you're not Jews? That's an interesting question, again we don't have time to pursue it, it points to us that by this time Christianity has significantly made inroads among the Gentile community that it is no longer identified, as it was in the book of Acts, as a subset of Judaism. That there are a significant number of now Gentiles who have embraced the message about the Christ.

That's the first question. The second question is, what is the affection which they have for one another? Or put more popularly, why do you love each other? The third question is, why is it that this has come about only recently? Why is it this new mode of living has just appeared, and why isn't it old? Behind that is a philosophical conviction that is at complete odds with one that is dominant in our culture. In our culture, if something is new, it must be true.

If it's old, well, it's fuddy-duddy, it's dodgy, get rid of it, put it on the rubbish heap. And there are some reasons for that. One of them certainly would be the dominance of technology in our culture.

And I've got nothing to say but praise for advancing technology. I'm glad I've got a Pentium and not a Commodore 64, and the things you can do with a Pentium. But having said that, it is a mistake, a fundamental mistake, to think that because technology is always advancing, that therefore we can learn nothing of wisdom or how to live life from people who've lived 50, 100, 200 and so many years ago.

In the Roman culture, it's completely different. If it's new, it's got to be false. If it's old, it's true.

And so you also have to give a defense as to why Christianity is so, if it's true, why did nobody care about it 300 years ago? Now, the letter then is a defense, or seeking to answer these questions. What is interesting, as he draws that first chapter to a close, he prays. And that's what that last little part is.

I welcome this eager desire in you, I ask of God, who bestows on us the power of both speech and hearing, that it may be given to me, so to speak, that you may be edified as much as possible by your hearing, and to you, so to hear, that I by my speaking may suffer no regret. He prays publicly in the letter, really. He's praying that I might have the ability so that when I speak, you can hear, and you might have the ability to hear.

Notice the other thing that he does here, too. He's talking about speaking and hearing. He's not talking about reading and writing, which again points to maybe a minor little issue, but I think it has some significance.

It's again pointing to something about Greek and Roman writing and the reading of written documents. When you wrote a document, you sounded it out loud. The idea of writing something silently is almost unheard of in the ancient world.

You said it out loud. You heard it first in many respects. All of the New Testament documents were written not to be read silently, but to be heard as a spoken voice.

That's very important, very important. The second thing is when you received a letter, when you read anything, you always read aloud. Nobody read silently in the ancient world.

Libraries, if they had libraries, would have been very interesting places. They would not have had any of the signs that you sometimes see in our libraries about silence and not making noise, because everybody read aloud. There's a very famous scene, and we'll come to this scene, in Augustine's Confessions, the story of his conversion and life, a fascinating book, in which he mentions meeting a man who was very instrumental in his conversion, Ambrose in Milan.

And he went into a garden where Ambrose was reading a Christian book, and Augustine says, I could hear him. And he mentions that because it was so shocking to Augustine. Everybody, no, sorry, forgive me, he mentions he could not hear him.

It was so shocking to Augustine. You always, when you read something, you read it out loud, and when you knew somebody was reading, you heard them. And he says he came into the garden, Ambrose was reading, he knew he was reading because he could see him.

He had the book there, but he could not hear him. A minor point, but actually it does have significance. It means that when you wrote something, you wrote in accordance with how it sounded.

And I think that has significance. I won't pursue this in the New Testament. The New Testament, some of it is written, or all of it is written to be read, and some of it is shaped by how does it sound.

Now in what follows, he gets into a variety of ways of answering those questions. Chapter 2 there is an attempt to show that the Greek and Roman gods are a product of human imagination. They're a product of human technology.

They're made by humans, and it's a fairly frontal attack on Graeco-Roman polytheism. And the Greeks and Romans, their understanding of the gods is very well summed up by 1 Corinthians 8, where the Apostle Paul, for instance, says that in the larger culture around us, verse 3, there are many gods and many lords, but for us there is one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. And the Greeks and Romans, here the author is trying to show, their gods are made by you.

And the difference between your God and our God is our God has revealed himself, and he's real and genuine, and your gods are a product of your imagination. In chapter 7, over the page, he actually goes into detailing who is the God of the Christians. And let me read to you it again, and again it's, most of it's all one sentence, all one sentence in the original, and the translator's chosen it that way, but it makes for quite a mouthful.

Chapter 7, and I'll read from 1 down to verse 4. This is not, he's talking about Christianity, as I said, an earthly discovery which was committed to them, the Christians, no mortal idea which they think it their duty to guard with such care, nor have they been entrusted with the stewardship of mere human mysteries. But in truth, God himself, the all-sovereign and all-creating and invisible God, himself from heaven established among men the truth and the holy and incomprehensible word, and fixed it firmly in their hearts, not as one might surmise by sending to men some servant or an angel or ruler, or some of those who administer the affairs of earth, or one of those entrusted with the ordering of things in heaven, but the very artificer of, that is, maker or creator, and maker of the universe himself, by whom he created the heavens, by whom he confined the sea in its own bounds, whose mysteries all the elements faithfully guard, from whom the sun has received the measure of its daily rounds to keep, whom the moon obeys as he bids her shine by night, whom the stars obey as they follow the course of the moon, by whom all things have been ordered and determined and placed in subjection. The heavens and the things in the heavens, the earth and the things

therein, the sea and what is in the sea, fire, air, abyss, the things in the heights, the things in the depths, the things in the realm between, him he sent of them, that he send him, as a man might conclude to will and tyranny and terror and awe, not so but in gentleness and meekness he sent them.

As a king sending a son who is a king, he sent him as God, he sent him as man unto men. And what he's talking about there is the fact that the assertion, very strong assertion of the early church, that Christianity is not a human, product of human thinking, it's not a product of human deliberation, it's not merely human, it is, at its heart, revelation. And it is God's revelation of himself, and that revelation is summed up ultimately in a person, namely Jesus Christ.

He doesn't mention the name of Christ here, he doesn't mention the name of Jesus. Interestingly, the whole document doesn't mention that at all, the actual name of Jesus Christ. But it's obvious who he's talking about.

And then he goes on in the next sections to talk about the nature of why Christianity, though it is new, is true. And in chapters 8 and 9, and we don't have time to read it, he talks about how Christianity has always existed in this sense, in that God had intended to do what he has done in the person of Christ from eternity past, but he revealed it only to his son. Personally, I would fault the author at this point, I don't think his argument is as strong as it could have been.

He could have, and it's not clear why he doesn't, he could have turned to the Old Testament, and shown that predictions of Christ and so on, and the knowledge of the true God are found among the people of Israel, which is a much older culture than the Greeks and Romans. He doesn't do it, and I think it doesn't strengthen his case that he doesn't. But nonetheless, in that section, and I want to just read this, section 9.2, where he's been talking, chapter 9, verse 2, he's been talking about God waiting until men and women had reached the point where they knew that they could not inherit the kingdom of heaven by their own power.

And he says this, O is about halfway down, and there's about five lines below where verse 2 starts, O the exceeding kindness and love of God, who did not hate us, or repel us, or remember our misdeeds, but was long-suffering, bore with us in self, and mercy took on him our sins, and self gave up his own son as a ransom for us. The holy one for the wicked, the innocent for the guilty, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for mortals. For what else could cover our sins but his righteousness? And whom was it possible for us, wicked and impious as we were, to be justified except in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange and work of God beyond all searching out, O blessings past our expectations, the wickedness of many shall be hidden in one righteous man, and the righteousness of the one should justify.

He moves, and it's interesting that you find this all through scripture, he moves from theology, or defense of the faith, into doxology. He moves from thinking about what God has done, to just being overwhelmed, that we who were wicked and sinners, and to whom we had been among that crowd that crucified Christ, would have done that, that God had mercy. And then in chapter 10, he basically argues now, why is it we love each other? And I'm going to have to sum up because of time, but he says, if you have experienced God's love for you, then you will love as he loves.

You could be an imitator of God, he says, by loving others as he has loved us. And in other words, he's answering that question, why is it that Christians love each other? And this is a common thing, this is not the only document, I can show you actually pagan documents which talk about the love that Christians

have for one another. Sometimes poking fun at the gullibility of Christians, but their community stood out, there was something there.

In other words, defending the faith was not merely a matter of philosophical argumentation, but also pointing to the lifestyle of Christians, and it differed in certain aspects of their culture. And he said, if you've known the love of God, it will be reflected in the way you treat other human beings. He has one other remark, and this brings us full circle, if you turn back to chapter 7, and this will conclude and have a few questions.

Chapter 7 verse 8, actually verse 7 and 8, and again he's been talking in an earlier section about the way Christians are persecuted by their culture, and he says this, do you not see them, 7-7, thrown to wild beasts that they may deny the Lord and yet unconquered? Do you not see that as more of them are punished, so much to others abound? These things do not seem to the works of man, they are a mighty deed of God, they are proof of his presence. Why is Christianity true? He says, because of the martyrs. This is not merely human.

And he is pointing to a fact that a number of pagans remarked on, the shock that they had that these men and women could die joyfully. And the Romans were expert engineers, expert road builders, expert builders of all kinds of things, they were experts at killing people as well. And if you read a number of the accounts of martyrdom, the deaths that some of these men and women went through were horrific.

The Romans knew how to stretch a person's death out over a long period of time, and they were amazed that these people could go to death joyfully, some of them singing. And here the author says, this is the proof. Well let me stop here and ask if there may be any questions, and why don't we take questions for maybe five minutes and then break, and I have gone over by about ten minutes.

And I'll repeat the question for the tape. Yeah, by the year, the one answer that I know for a fact is by the year 300, it's estimated that around 12 to 15% of the empire were Christian. And so we're looking, if the empire is about 80 million, we're looking around probably 8 to 12 million being Christian.

That was by the year 300, 312 roughly. That's a fairly significant growth if you think of a few thousand on the day of Pentecost. Certain areas of the empire were more, there were more Christians than others.

Sobering to realize that most of what is now western Turkey was probably 50 to 60% Christian by the year 310. Very sobering in view of where Turkey is at today. Now the question was, most of the early Christians were of the lower class, and what began to make the aristocracy take note, or how did Christianity begin to penetrate among the aristocracy? It really doesn't start to penetrate the aristocracy until 312, after 312.

The fourth century is probably the key century in which Christianity begins to penetrate the aristocracy, and that's after the legalization of Christianity as a tolerated religion. And so one has to wonder, did the aristocracy only start to begin to be converted in significant numbers when they realized that the wind was now politically blowing that way? This is not to say that there were no Christians of the upper classes or the educated classes converted before. This man has impeccable Greek.

A number of the key theologians, men like Origen and Titian, both North Africans. It's obvious that they have significant education. Cyprian, who's again a North African.

Very wealthy, wealthy man. But by and large it's not until the fourth century you begin to get the large penetration of the aristocracy, and then one suspects that a large part of it is because the political winds

have blown that way. Now I'm not wanting to say that therefore all of those professions are spurious.

Significant numbers, it's not until the fourth century. Okay, you're talking now about Christ? Okay. The question was Christ and itinerant ministry and doesn't seem to have set up a church in any one place.

Christ's ministry is itinerant, but it still is focused. You have a number of the stories in the Gospels in which he brings out very clearly that his ministry is to the Jews. For instance, the encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman up in what would be today probably Lebanon, southern Lebanon, at Tyre, if I recall correctly.

And she comes to him asking him a favor and he talks about, well, the table is being set for you don't give the bread to the dogs. It's a very strong statement. And I don't want to get into what that might mean at this point.

But she interpreted it, she's a Gentile, and one of the Jews often thought of Gentiles was they were dogs. But she says, nonetheless, they gathered up the crumbs under the table. And his response is, I've not seen such face.

He does what he did. A number of other times he specifically says my ministry is to the house of Israel. I have been called to the house of Israel.

So while he does not focus in one area, nonetheless, in one geographical area, it is focused. It is a focused ministry. And a number of the questions the early church has to wrestle with after the ministry of Christ have to do with areas he hadn't touched.

For instance, what happens when you've got a man or a woman who's married to a person who's not a believer? 1 Corinthians 7. Do you stay with them? Well, Jesus' discussion of marriage is completely in the context of professing Jews. And so the context of maybe a Gentile unbeliever married to a Gentile believer just is never broached by him. So the church has to wrestle with these sorts of things.

Obviously, for Christ's ministry is the fulfillment of all that stretch of Old Testament prophecy, which predicted that from the house of Judah, as it were, would come the Messiah. And he had to do the work of the Messiah for the Jewish people, as it were, through his ministry. But it's obvious from his numerous statements he makes, Matthew 28 being probably the most prominent, that the gospel was for all.

Yes, the question was in a section of the document of the letter to Agnidus, it mentions the persecution of the Jewish community against... Obviously it was. Obviously it was. At this point in time, the Jews had been completely expelled from Judea.

The Jewish war, 66-73, had effectively broken the military backbone of the Jewish resistance to Roman rule. But there was a revolt from 130-135 under a man named Bar-Choppa. And it took the Romans five years to conquer Judea.

And at that point they said, that's it. And all the Jewish Jews were expelled from Judea. So obviously the persecution he's talking about is from synagogues outside of Judea.

But it obviously is still happening. The question was, as you get the division of Jew and Gentile in the separation of Christians from their Jewish roots, how do these new Christians, especially in the second century, maintain their hold on the Jewish traditions, which are so much part of the New Testament? Well,

I think you do see a reflection here. Definitely there's been a division here.

So much so that those on the outside can look at the church and say, you're not Jews. You're Gentiles. You're like the Jews in a certain sense, but you're not Jews.

Why? The second century is a great struggle in the church as to their Jewish roots. And the next lecturer actually picked this up with Gnosticism. Because the great question of Gnosticism was, is the Old Testament revelation? And the Gnostics come to the conviction it is not, and the church chose to keep it.

Which is a very, well, from a simply human historical point of view, very important move. It anchored Christianity to its Jewish roots. Now the churches and Christians have, from time to time, lost those roots and failed to see those roots.

And one thinks, for instance, of, say, in the 1930s, some professing Christians in Germany who failed to see their deeply Jewish roots. But they're always there, and the Old Testament is there, and the links of the new to the old cannot be so easily discarded, ultimately, in the long run. So the fact that the church chose to keep the Old Testament meant that the Old Testament was being read, it was being preached, it was being commented on, and those traditions and those roots would have been there in the community.

Now obviously a lot of the significance of some of those aspects would have been lost. But still there, there are still those Jewish roots that are kept alive. One more question and then we'll break.

Okay, like worship. Question was in terms of the early church's expression of itself. While you would have worship meetings, from some of the sources we have, we know that in many areas of the Roman Empire the church would meet twice on the first day of the week.

The Apostle Paul and those early Christians in the New Testament are still going to the synagogue on Saturday. But eventually that ends, say, for a variety of reasons, and the meeting on Saturday ends, and the first day of the week becomes the day. And probably because it was the day Christ rose.

In worship services you would have prayer, praise, singing. A pagan source written by Pliny, a Roman governor around 112, talks about how he had examined two deaconesses and tortured them to find out what they actually were up to. And he said, he was writing actually to the Roman Emperor, he said it was innocent stuff.

They met before dawn on a certain day where they would sing hymns to Christ as to God. So there was worship of Christ. In many respects that is, I think, one of the most distinctive aspects of the early church, the worship of Christ as God.

So there is sung worship, there is the opening up of the Word of God. By the time you move into the second century, and we'll look at this down the road, there are questions surrounding the canon. Which books are revelations and should be made into the New Testament? But despite those questions, there is the opening up of the Word of God, there will be prayer together.

Baptism would also be taking place. There are early baptisies that have been discovered, most of them I think third century, not second century. Worship was in house churches, and it was in house churches until around the year 300.

Christians did not have the legal ability to buy a property and make it into a church building. And so they normally met in what we call the atrium, generally in the house of a very wealthy person, and it would be the courtyard. Roman and Greek homes were built, a series of rooms off a central courtyard.

Central courtyard could probably hold 40 or 50 people. And as we'll see in the next hour, there is a fairly significant doctrinal base of the early church as well. Can we leave the questions until the end of the next hour? Because we probably need to take a break.

It's five to nine. We'll break now for about 12 minutes or so. And Vivian is going to, you're going to make an announcement, Vivian? And begin now to look at a very different sort of threat, the threat that comes from within the church as it were, rather than attack from without the church.

And one might certainly want to say that the more life-threatening for the existence of the church is the former, is the attack from within the church and not from outside the church. And so what we're going to look at in this hour is in some respects looking at a more significant type of problem. And I want to begin with some general remarks regarding the word heresy.

And there is such a thing, and underlying my remarks, there is such a thing as heresy. That is where something that is so central to Christianity is denied. That a person has moved beyond the pale of the Christian communion or community.

I have friends who use this word sometimes rather loosely, and their use of it loosely disturbs me deeply. By talking about heresy and its opposite orthodoxy, obviously, we're not talking about differences over church government. We're not talking about differences over what one might describe as eschatology.

How are all things going to eventually turn out and wrap up? We're not even talking about differences over certain approaches to issues of salvation. For instance, my own thinking is very strongly shaped by that way of thinking known as reforms. And I would describe myself theologically as reforms in my way of thinking about salvation.

And over against that there is a long tradition, and interesting in terms of the context in which I'm in, the building of the Arminian tradition, which has been probably most represented for much of its history by the Methodist denomination. And I have significant disagreements with men I treasure in terms of their lives and witness, men like John and Charles Wesley. But we're not talking here about heresy or orthodoxy.

When we're talking about heresy, we're talking about denial of what one might describe as the five or six absolutely fundamental things that make a person. We're talking about denial of the humanity of Christ. Was he truly human? Or the issue, for instance, as we'll look at when we come to the fourth century, of the Trinity.

These are the things that constitute what heresy and orthodoxy are about. Now our word heresy comes originally from a Greek word. It comes from a word called heresis, which in its original meaning meant choice.

That meaning of the word is not found in the New Testament. Rather, a developed meaning of that word, a choice that one makes that commits one to a party or to a group. For instance, in Acts 26 verse 5, Paul talks about himself, who having been at one time, he says in Acts 26 verse 5, I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest, and the word he uses is heresis, of our religion.

And it's translated here in the New Living by sect. And sometimes it's translated by the word party, and it doesn't have a negative meaning. It means a group of people who have identified themselves with a certain way of thinking, and so on.

In a couple of places in the Testament, it has to do with schisms. Galatians 5, where the Apostle Paul is listing what he describes as the works of the flesh, lists amongst them heresis, splitting churches, being schismatic. And then finally, in one verse in the New Testament, it has the meaning, as we would use the term, of believing something that has put you beyond the parameters of Christianity.

And that is 2nd Peter 2.1, where Peter is talking about false teachers who secretly introduce destructive heresies. Now you can't read the New Testament without noting the importance of doctrines and doctrinal convictions to the writers of the New Testament. You can't read the Apostle Paul, for instance, in the book of Galatians, where immediately after he's indicated who's writing the letter, he leaps into talking about, how is it that you have wondered, or turning away from the gospel? But there is only one gospel, he says.

And he goes on to emphasize that the idea that you can combine your standing with God on the basis of Christ plus circumcision, or Christ plus Jewish ceremony, no. Or you can't read 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul talks about how if you deny the resurrection of the body, then you are moving beyond the foundations of Christianity. Our faith, he emphasizes, is rooted in this fact, that God raised Christ from the dead.

Now there are all sorts of questions about the nature of the resurrection body. Yes, but God raised Christ from the dead. And so you can't read the New Testament without seeing the seriousness with which the writers, and the communities to whom they are writing, and of which they represent, the seriousness they put on critical thinking, and thinking through your thoughts, and establishing doctrine.

Now the first area of theological struggle that the Church found herself thrust into was a struggle with Gnosticism. And the word G-N-O-S-T-I-C-I-S-M comes from a Greek word gnosis, meaning knowledge. And we'll see how that applies in a few minutes.

There are all types of Gnostic groups in the late 1st century AD, and the 2nd century AD. The Church will find herself, and the struggle is already there in around the early 60s, the Church will find herself struggling against Gnosticism for probably 150, maybe 200 years. And there were a variety of different Gnostic teachers, and different Gnostic groups, and they differed among themselves.

But common to them all were a number of characteristics. And what I'd like to do, not spend time at all on looking at the very different groups, but look at the common characteristics of Gnosticism. The first thing that is basic, and I've listed them there on that set of notes, the first thing that is basic to Gnosticism is a worldview in which what we would describe as a radical cosmological dualism was affirmed.

That is that it was affirmed that the material realm, matter itself, this, my body, all of the aspects of the material world, that which involves us in the material world, was inherently evil. On the other hand, over against that, it was affirmed that the spiritual realm, the realm of spirit, was inherently good. And these two were opposed to one another.

And as we will see that this led to an affirmation, for instance, that the resurrection of the body, from the Gnostic point of view, was a fable. It was not going to happen. It had all sorts of consequences for the issues of martyrdom.

It had all sorts of consequences for your lifestyle, for instance, regarding marriage and sexuality, and how you related to your body. What is important underlying all of this is to realize that ideas have legs. That your worldview shapes the way you interact with society and culture and people.

Here's the words of one Gnostic text, the apocryphal Gospel of Philip. And how there came to be a gospel called the Gospel of Philip, I'll get into in a minute. The Gospel of Philip.

No one will hide a great and precious object in a precious vessel. There's a bit of truth in that. You've got something precious, and you want to hide it, and you put it in a place that people aren't going to look at.

You put it in a precious vessel, now take the precious vessel, and your precious object is there. No. Many times has someone put something worth countless myriads into a vessel worth a farthing, and then this is the application.

So it is with the soul. It is a precious thing, and got into a despised body. In other words, what's precious about being human? It's the soul, not the body.

And so the goal of life is to escape the body. Bodily existence is one of the major problems in the mind of a Gnostic. The fact that we are imprisoned in bodies.

The second point to note about Gnostic thinking is that this salvation came, or this escape, comes by way of knowledge, not faith. It comes by way of Gnosis. That's the key word there for Gnosticism, not faith.

It comes by recognizing that in your body is a divine spark, or a part of God. Now you might be thinking, some of this sounds very current and very familiar. It's ancient.

It's Gnostic. I'm not talking now about current New Age thought. I'm talking about Gnostic thought expressed in the second century.

And the Gnostics argued that in your body there is, at least in the body of those who will be saved, it wasn't true for anybody else, but in their bodies there was a divine being. There are various ways of explaining how that part of the divine, or God, came to be lodged in a body, but it was so, they argued. And salvation came when you realized in you was God.

When you realized that you were part of God. Salvation, then, is knowledge. It's enlightenment.

It's illumination. Orthodox Christian thinking as expressed in the New Testament, salvation is a realization of, first of all, of one's breach with God, that one's sin, conscious or unconscious, has brought about a breach with God, and that there's been reconciliation that has been made between you and God, and the reconciliation is through Christ. The number one problem for the New Testament is sin, not ignorance.

The number one problem for the Gnostic is ignorance. What needs to happen is you need to realize that you're God. You need to realize that part of you is a divine being, and therefore you will live your life as in a way of trying to help that divine being escape your body.

Salvation is thought of in terms of self-enlightenment, not deliverance from the penalty and the punishment of sin. There are links here, obviously, with certain New Age thinkers. A number of years ago, Shirley MacLaine had a four-part special in which a portion of it was filmed on a beach in California, in which she describes how, walking along a beach in California, somewhere in the late 70s, she suddenly realized she was God.

What she did not mean by that was that she suddenly realized that she was the being who made the entirety of the universe, but she suddenly realized that she contained a portion of the divine. Very similar, that little bit anyway, very similar to Gnostic thinking. And the links actually are not accidental.

The links are not fortuitous. In the late 1940s, there was a large cache, or amount, of Gnostic literature found at a place called Nagamati in Upper Egypt. And probably anywhere around 140 to 150 Gnostic documents had been buried.

Scholars disagree as to why they were buried. We needn't go into that. But they were buried and discovered in the late 1940s.

Initially only the preserve of scholars who could look at them. They eventually began to trickle out into popular publication in the late, in the 60s, probably late 60s, but definitely in the early, late 70s and early 80s. In fact, I can still recall reading, I still recall seeing in a supermarket near a checkout, one of those little kind of stands where they would have paperbacks because they are reading these documents.

The third point to note about Gnosticism is that the person who enlightens you is Jesus. Not true for all Gnostics. A number of Gnostic systems don't have this.

But most Gnostics argued that Jesus is the enlightener. He's the teacher. What is important to note here is that there again has been a subtle shift from the New Testament presentation of the person of Christ.

In the New Testament, just as vital as his teaching, some might argue more vital, but just as vital as his teaching is his death and resurrection. For the Gnostic, his death and resurrection are almost completely unimportant. In fact, his death and resurrection are embarrassing to the Gnostic, as we'll see.

The argument is, it is his teaching. He is primarily the teacher. He is the one who comes and enlightens you as to your true self.

He reveals to you who you are. Acts of John are Gnostic documents. The Apostle John is supposedly recalling that there was times when he was with Christ and he said this, sometimes I met with a solid and material body, other times when I felt in the substance was immaterial, as if it did not exist at all.

The Gnostic, when it focused on Christ, what is important is his work as an enlightener, not his work as a true human being who died on a cross and was raised bodily. Again, another Gnostic writer, a man named Ptolemaeus, a very influential Gnostic leader in Rome in the mid, or actually in the late 100s. He could say Christ passed through Mary as water passes through a pipe.

Completely fallacious way of viewing the Incarnation. Because when water goes through a pipe, this wasn't always true of Roman plumbing, but the best of Roman plumbing, when the water went through the pipe, it didn't pick up any of the pipe and brought it out the other end. In other words, the assertion is that the Incarnation took place, but Christ did not assume or take any part of Mary.

And yet the Christian affirmation in the New Testament is consistently, Jesus of Nazareth was fully human. The same man, Ptolemaeus, could say this, matter is not capable of being saved. In other words, what is important about, for the Gnostic, is the realisation of who you truly are.

What you have within you is a divine spark, and the goal of life is to get that divine spark out of your body and back to the divine. Now again, and I haven't completely finished looking at the various characteristics

of Gnosticism, again there are many debates as to where early Gnosticism comes from. There's no doubt it made hay, or it made headway out of early Christian thinking.

It preyed on early Christian communities. But scholars have argued, many of them, that it comes out of Greek thinking. The body is a tomb.

And some scholars have argued, and while what these early Gnostics are, is that people professed Christ in a Greek Gentile context, and then they brought their worldview into the church, and tried to reshape the church's teaching to their previous worldview. And that probably has some semblance of truth. My own thinking though, is that probably also some a feeder into Gnosticism, what came from the Jewish community.

One of the big setbacks among Jews in the first century AD, was the failure of the Jewish zealots to throw off Roman rule between 66 and 73. Enormous numbers of Jewish men and women during the time of Christ's ministry, and shortly after, were involved in some way or form with a whole zealot movement, looking for a political messiah. If not actively trying to bring about the rule of that messiah, at least looking and hoping for it.

And then the Jewish war takes place. And there is active rebellion, but it fails. Jerusalem is taken in 70 AD, and the last showdown at Masada in 73.

And I think it can be shown and argued that some of those Jewish people turned from involvement in politics to escaping this world. They turned from involvement in the politics of their day to a completely inner world, a spiritual realm. And the reason why that argument makes a lot of sense to me, is you can see it down through the history of the church on a number of occasions.

For instance, in the Puritan period in the 1640s, when the Puritan rule of England fails by 1660, many of the Puritan leaders turned from involvement in politics to spiritual matters. They'd always been interested in spiritual matters, but they become wholly concerned with the spiritual and neglect the political. And one wonders whether some of that was at play here too.

But those are just speculations. What we do know is that there was a movement which affirms the goodness of spirit, the evil of matter. Affirmed the goal of life was to escape the body.

Who affirmed that the way of salvation was through coming to the realization you were part of the divine, and the one who enlightened you was Jesus. And then finally, there was a great, there were lifestyle implications to all of this. For instance, what do you do with the body? I think one of the great insights of the last 30 or 40 years by scholars studying this period, and a part of it has been prompted, I think, by the last 30 or 40 years, our culture has shifted to a great interest in the body, for good and for ill.

But one of the impacts that it's had upon historians is they've gone back and started to ask questions earlier scholars did not ask. And they've suddenly started to realize one of the great struggles that's going on in the first and second centuries in Christian communities is, how does my body relate to the world? And it was the Gnostics who raised that question, really, in many respects, or pushing it. Some of them, only a very few, argued, if what is important is my spirit, and my body is just going to be trashed, it doesn't matter what my body does.

I can do anything, unless they argue for a libertine lifestyle. Some of them argued, if you've got a pearl, and you drop it in the mud, does anything really change it? Does it really get changed? No, you pick it up,

wipe it off, still a beautiful pearl. Likewise, I can plunge into sexual immorality, does it affect my spirit? No, no, no.

And there were a few Gnostics, and we know this from the writings of a man named Irenaeus, who actually recorded their statements and sayings in defence of a libertine lifestyle. Most Gnostics, though, went to the other extreme. If the body is evil, you keep away from any involvement of the body in this world as much as possible.

And probably the places where the body comes to the fore in so many respects are two, marriage and eating. And thus the Gnostics, many of them, adopted strict rules of what you could eat and what you couldn't eat. Many of them were ascetics, in terms of fasting and so on.

And marriage, the true Gnostic didn't get married. And sexuality and marriage are evil. And thus you can have one Syrian Gnostic, Saturninus, in the 2nd century, marriage and procreation are of Satan, he has reported.

It's also interesting that issues of dying also come into this, because the whole process of dying is about the body. It's interesting that the Gnostics, when confronted with martyrdom, had no qualms about denying the faith that they supposedly professed outwardly, and thus not being martyred. One of the things the Orthodox community regularly said to the Gnostics, where are your martyrs? And we know of, and maybe it's only because of the accidents of history, but we know of no Gnostic martyrs.

In fact, a number of the Orthodox writers, like for instance Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in the year 110, on his way to martyrdom, he writes a letter to the church at Smyrna, one of the seven churches, about ten years after John would have written his letter to Smyrna. And he writes a letter to the Smyrnians and talks to them about the fact that he is on his way to martyrdom, but there are Gnostics bothering the church. And he says this, if Christ did not really suffer and die, why am I on my way to suffer and die? And you can see the link.

If Christ didn't physically die, then why am I willing to die for him? And that argument occurs right in a section in which he's attacking Gnosticism, and it's obviously the Gnostics are making the argument, it's foolish to die a martyr. Christ didn't really die. There are various ways of explaining how Christ didn't die.

Some of them argued he was completely a phantom, never fully physical. Some of them argued, and this one has real interest for later thought, some of them argued that just before the crucifixion, the real Christ was taken away and someone else was crucified. Some argued it was Judas, some another person, but it wasn't the Christ.

If you read the Quran, Surah 4, 157 to 158, it says there very clearly that they say, Christians, say that Jesus was crucified, but they are wrong. Allah took him up. And it's a very clear indication that Muhammad, in his early years of formulating his understanding of God and the world, had contact, actually, with Gnostics.

And there were Gnostic communities in Syria on the borders of the Saudi Peninsula. But that's much later. Now, all of what we're talking about here does not appear after the end of the New Testament.

You can actually go back into the New Testament and see the struggles. And what I'd like to do is trace four or five texts. And I want to begin with the book of Acts, Acts 20.

In the book of Acts, in chapter 20, the Apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he stops at Miletus and calls, Miletus is on the, what is now the Turkish coast, and he calls for the elders in Ephesus to travel down to Miletus, where we have a very, very important speech that Paul gives them. And verse 17 of Acts 20, we read this, when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church of Ephesus, asking them to come down to meet him. And then later in that speech, in verse 27 of 28, he says this, beware, be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock, his church purchased with his blood, over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders.

I know full well that false teachers like vicious wolves will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out.

Whether those words were a general warning, whether those words were a prophetic insight, within a few years those words were becoming true. If you jump over to Colossians, Colossians 2, or if you just follow along as we read, Colossians 2, verses 8 and 9. Colossi is about 50 miles east in a dew line in the Egnatian way, a very important Roman road that cuts through southern Turkey. It's about 50 miles east of Ephesus.

And in Colossians, we have a number of disturbing things being reported on in the community at Colossi. For instance, Colossians 2, verses 16 to 23. Don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths.

These rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself. Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. Don't let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they've had visions about this.

These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud. But they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body, for we are joined together in his body by his strong sinews, and we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God. You have died with Christ.

He has set you free from the evil powers of this world. Why do you keep on following rules of the world such as don't handle, don't eat, don't touch? Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline, but they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires.

You can't read through that text seeing that there had come into the community at Colossae a group of individuals of a very strongly legalistic bent. Don't handle, don't eat, don't touch. Men and women who had specific rules about what you should eat and what you should drink.

If you didn't follow those rules, you were not in communion with God. In fact, that little word in verse 21 there, don't handle, it's a euphemism for sexual involvement. And it's quite clear that, at least if you read it from that perspective, that some of these teachers were saying, you should not be involved in sexual relations in marriage.

Also interesting in that passage is this idea of worshipping angels and having visions. A number of the Gnostics had a whole kind of ladder of spirit beings whom you would be involved in placating or worshipping as you made your way up to God. Or then you jump over to 1 Timothy 4 verses 1-3.

1 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy when he was in Ephesus. It was written around 65 AD, maybe 66 AD, about 8 years after he gave the warning in Acts 20. And then we suddenly read this.

The Holy Spirit tells us clearly in the last times, some will turn away from what we believe. They will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons. These teachers are hypocrites and liars.

They pretend to be religious, but their conscience is dead. They will say it's wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. A clear indication of what we would, historians would eventually call Gnostic teaching, that you shouldn't get married, that you shouldn't eat certain foods.

Or in 2 Timothy 2, 16-18. 2 Timothy 2, 16-18. Written probably about 3 years after 1 Timothy, maybe 4 years.

Written definitely before the year 68, when Paul was martyred. Martyred traditionally under the emperor Nero. But 2 Timothy 2, 16.

We read this. Avoid godless, foolish discussions that lead to more and more ungodliness. This kind of talk spreads like cancer.

Hymenaeus and Philetus are examples of this. They have left the path of truth, preaching the lie, the resurrection of the dead has already occurred. That's a puzzling statement.

I mean, these men couldn't have been what we might describe as fools or ninnies. I mean, it's obvious the resurrection of the dead hasn't yet taken place. We're still walking around this world in these bodies, but what do they mean? Well, they could have meant that the only true resurrection takes place when you get converted.

It's a resurrection of spirits. This body is going to be chucked off at death, sloughed off, thrown under the trash heap. It's not going to have a resurrection take place.

Thus Paul's very strong response to it, this is a lie. And central to the Christian faith is the resurrection of the body. Because it's rooted in the affirmation that Christ was raised.

Or look at 1 John 4. By tradition, and notice all the links, except for the caution text, all the links to Ephesus. By tradition, John lived his last years in Ephesus. It's a good tradition.

All of the early writers after the New Testament that speak about John and where he lived, say he lived in Ephesus. And thus we read 1 John 4 verses 1 to 3. Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak for the Spirit. You must test them to see if the Spirit they have comes from God.

For there are many false prophets in the world. This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God. If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person is the Spirit of God.

If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the Spirit of the Antichrist. What's at stake here? It's the issue of the Incarnation.

The issue of the fact that Jesus was actually a bodily human being, that he assumed all of humanity. And the church struggled with Gnostics for a century and a half after this period, well into the 200s. And what was disturbing and what was confusing to many Christians was the way that Gnostics could use Christian language.

Let's picture the scene. A Gnostic comes into a local Christian community. He's asked, as he's been there a while maybe, or, when did you profess faith? Or, when were you saved? Or, are you saved? And what the Christian might mean by that is, when did you realize that you needed to embrace the salvation that is freely offered in Christ? And realize that you were a sinner and that there was a breach between you and God? And when did you turn in faith and believe that when Christ died, he died for your sins? The Gnostic could say such and such a day.

What he means by that is, and what he understands the question, or wants you to understand, he wants you to think he's one of the community, but what he's thinking is, and he can actually say, yes, when did I come to realize that I was part of the divine being, that there was a divine spark in me? You could talk about Jesus as the illuminator and the enlightener with a Gnostic. Because enlightenment language, illumination language, was very much part of the church language. Hebrews 10 talks about when you were first enlightened.

Light is a very powerful metaphor used again and again in the New Testament about realization of the nature of who you are and the breach between you and God and so on. And the Gnostics could take this language. Or they might tell you, why don't you come to a meeting we've got going on at our home? We have another, we have a new scripture to read.

And what we'll see with the issue with the canon is it took a while for the scriptures to be collected into what we call the canon of the New Testament. And it could be that your church didn't have all the Gospels. And so the Gnostic comes and says, we've got the Gospel of Thomas.

I didn't know there was a Gospel of Thomas. Why, yes there is. We have a meeting at our home, why don't you come and read? And the Gnostics wrote a variety of other books.

The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Acts of John, the Gospel of Philip. There's about 30 to 40 such Gospels and Acts. And when we look at the canon, we want to pick that question up.

And many of the great church writers and theologians of the second century, Justin Martyr and Tertullian and Irenaeus and Ignatius, many of their books are written against the Gnostics. And the one we want to look at very briefly, and we'll take about 10 minutes or so and then close, and we'll have some questions, is Irenaeus. Greek speaker, raised in near Smyrna, knew a man named Polycarp.

What is important about his knowledge of Polycarp, he actually was mentored by Polycarp, is that Polycarp knew the Apostle John. Polycarp was born around 70 AD. He was martyred around 155, when he was about 85 or 90.

He mentions at his martyrdom, when the Roman governor tells him, sacrifice to the emperor. He says, have I served Christ these 86 years that I would do this. And he was probably born into a Christian home and been raised in a Christian family, but we don't know that for sure.

But Irenaeus sat under Polycarp, an important link to the Apostolic generation. When he was in his 20s, he left Turkey, what is now Turkey, or Asia Minor then, and went to Rome. It is there he met a number of Gnostic leaders, Ptolemaeus and Valentinus.

Encountered them, encountered their teaching, became convinced they were wrong, dead wrong. And then at some point went to Gaul, or now France, where he became a missionary theologian, a missionary bishop in the church at Lyon. He talks in his great book Against Heresies, he talks about how his Latin,

actually his Greek story, is rusty, because he's been speaking a barbarous dialect for so long.

What he's talking about is that his preaching and teaching were in Gaulish, which is an old Celtic language, doesn't exist anymore, akin to Irish and Scottish Gaelic, and Welsh, and Cornish and Breton. And the language is sub-Sinise else. He's a very marvelously human figure, and we don't know much about him.

He dies around the year 200. Most of his community is martyred in 177. There's a text called The Martyrs of Lyon that records it, it's a horrific account in some respects, a glorious account in others.

And he was away on a trip to Rome, he comes back to find about 50 of his church, all the church leadership, dead, martyred. It's around that same time he writes Against Heresies. And he talks in the early books of how it was a difficult task, because he compares himself to being a jeweller, a man who had to examine jewels to find out whether they were the real thing or not.

He actually talks about emeralds, he had to examine emeralds, whether they were the real thing or not. Simply cut glass. The Romans were experts at use of glass.

If you go to the RON, the third floor, where you have the Egyptian and Middle Eastern exhibit, and the Greeks, and you go through the Roman exhibit, you'll find examples of their use of glass. He says, he was like a jeweller examining jewels. So he says, I was examining this craftily decked out theology.

He's talking about the Gnostics. Craftily decked out in an attractive dress to make it appear to the unexperienced more true than truth itself. In this book he argues against Gnosticism along a number of lines, quite a number of lines, but I wanted to note two.

The first is the Scriptures. He goes back to the New Testament, and he compares the Scriptures, what he has accepted as canon, and most of it, except for one or two books, actually probably three or four books, is what we would have as canon. He doesn't mention those other books.

And he compares that to Gnostic teaching. And he finds, he says, in Paul, an emphasis on the resurrection and the resurrection of the body. He finds in the Gospel of Luke, in Luke 23, that Christ sat down and ate with the disciples.

And he says, this is the truth that I was taught as a young boy. This is the truth that Polycarp taught. And Polycarp taught it because he heard it from John.

How then are we to believe these men who come along now, a hundred or so years later, and tell us that true Christianity doesn't affirm the resurrection of the body? Which one is more likely to be true? In other words, what he's arguing for is both the fact that tradition, the tradition of teaching, is the same as the teaching of Scripture. Now, he lived at a juncture where there was only two generations between himself and Scripture, and he could argue like that. But he goes back, what he's doing is he's going back to Scripture, and he's testing teaching against Scripture.

The other thing he does is he argues in favor of a creedal Christianity. And he a number of times says, this is the faith that the church in Gaul affirms. It's the same faith that is affirmed at Rome, and the same faith that is affirmed in Asia Minor, and Egypt, and North Africa.

And he should know something of what he's talking about because he'd lived in quite a number of those places. And he says this, the church, so dispersed throughout the whole world, has received from the apostles this, she believes in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the sea and all things are in them, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaims with the prophets the dispensations of God, the advent, the birth from a virgin, the passion, the resurrection of the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ, and his future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father, to gather all things in one, in order that to Christ our Lord and God and Savior and King, according to the will of the Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue should confess, confess. In other words, what he affirms is that there is a core, this is important, there is a core of doctrine that is absolutely fundamental.

He knows, and we know through other writings, he knows that Christians can differ on issues. There was a big debate in his day as to what day you should celebrate Easter. The Church of Rome celebrated it according to one calendar.

The Church of Rome found out they were doing differently in Asia Minor, and the Church of Rome actually was going to excommunicate and disfellowship everybody in Asia Minor who celebrated Easter on a different day. Irenaeus finds out about what's going on. He writes to the elders of Rome, and he says, he uses pretty strong language, and in our colloquial language, basically, you're nuts! It's wrong.

We're a Christian community. There should be unity on the essentials, but the willingness to celebrate in diversity, and so on. But he also knows that there is a core of truth, that there is a God the Father, and the maker of heaven and earth.

In other words, creation is good because God made it. And to say creation is evil is to opium God. And there is one more Jesus Christ, and he is the one who died, physically died for our salvation.

There was a real incarnation, a real death, a real resurrection, ascension and an advent coming again, and one Holy Spirit. How did the Church then struggle against Narcissism? We see it in a number of ways, and with this I'm going to close. It did so by, as Irenaeus does, going back to Scripture and affirming that Scripture is the touchstone.

It did so by affirming that there is a core of truth, that you have to embrace to be a Christian. But to be a Christian has meaning. It doesn't mean believing everything and anything.

It means believing certain things. In other texts, we can see that the early Church prayed for those who may eventually disfellowshipped because they were Gnostics. There were splits that took place because they realized that these people are teaching things that will undermine ultimately the heart of Christianity.

Now one final statement that kind of brings this lecture and the previous lecture together. One of the most precious documents from the 2nd century Church is a hymn book. The earliest hymn book we have, called the Odes of Solomon.

Originally Syriac Christian, and we have it in Greek. And one of the hymns goes like this. Translation is not in rhyme, and you have to use your imagination to put it into rhyme, and whether or not you can sing it.

There went forth a stream, and it became a river, great and broad, and the restraints of men were not able to restrain it, nor the arts of them who habitually restrain water. It spread over the surface of the earth, it

filled everything. Then all the thirsty upon the earth drank, and their thirst was relieved and quenched, for from the Most High the drink was given.

And what it's talking about is the spread of the Church, and how there had been attempts to stand against that spread. Persecution, the rise of heresy, in this case the Gnostics, but the Church had overcome them. And when we see the advance of the Church in these years, it is very similar to a river spreading over a flat area of land, unable to be dammed.

Well let me stop here and ask if there might be some questions, and in subsequent lectures I will endeavour to keep to the time period. I apologise for having gone longer in the first lecture than I should have. Any questions about either this lecture or the previous one? The question was the split that eventually takes place between the Roman Church and the Byzantine Church.

The division there in this period, I think it's still anachronistic to talk about the Roman Church, well a Roman Catholic theologian and historian would differ, but my view of this period is that there is, the features of what become typically Roman Catholic are now present, at least the key elements, one of which is the papacy. And so the division here is between two local churches. What eventually becomes the division between Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, a part of it takes place in the latter part of the Empire when increasingly there is a linguistic division between the Greek speaking East and the Latin speaking West, sealed by the fall of the Roman Empire, which basically submerges in a wave of barbarian, from the point of view of the Romans, invasions the West, but not the East.

The Eastern Roman Empire still exists in the late Middle Ages and doesn't disappear until 1453. The actual split between the Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church is in 1054, but all of that is much, much later. The battle is probably more around 250.

And by the early 300s there are very few Gnostic communities left. And it basically does die out, except for maybe a couple of forms that it is transformed into. But definitely by the 300s it has largely disappeared.

The question was, was Gnosticism peculiar to Christianity? In many respects, yes. It appears to be something that Christianity, the appearance of Christianity enabled that way of thinking that we call Gnostic to take off. What are the things that feed into it? What are its roots? Scholars differ over.

But definitely that way of thinking that we call Gnosticism took off with the appearance of Christianity. Judaism has a very strong affirmation of the goodness of the world in it. And it would be very difficult for any sort of Gnostic way of thinking to flourish in that context.

I think, in my argument earlier, I think they were on the fringes of Judaism and the failure of the Jewish revolt in 66-73, I think were impetuses for the rise of Gnosticism in certain forms. But no, you're right. Christianity seems to be, its appearance, its presence seems to be the major vehicle that enables Gnosticism to emerge as a full-blown way of thinking.

The question was, why did Gnosticism die out in the 4th century, the very century when Christianity became legalized, when we see today the thriving of certain cults, in a context obviously where Christianity, at least in the West, is legalized and tolerated. That's a very good question, and it's a question I've never fully, I don't think I probably could fully answer, why Gnosticism dies out in the 4th century. That it does, is very evident.

Most of my study of Gnosticism has been 2nd century, when the struggle of the church with Gnosticism was at its height. By the 4th century, it's almost completely disappeared. The question is why.

What were the human factors that led to its collapse and disappearance. If you permit me to think about that over the next week, and I will make a note of thinking about it. Any answer I feel at this point would be kind of premature.

You think it would have freedom, once it becomes legalized, you think it'd have freedom to flourish. Now by the end of the 4th century, there is one form of Christianity which is affirmed. It's basically an orthodox form of Christianity, and it has become the only legal religion of the empire.

In the year 300, it was dangerous to be a Christian in the empire. At the end of the 300s, in 400, it's dangerous to be a pagan. Gnosticism has pretty well gone before that.

It's a very good question. I don't have the answer. I will think about it and reflect on it.

Any other questions before we close? Just a brief remark about next week, and then do you have something to finish, Davis? Next week we want to look at Tertullian and the Montanist controversy. The Montanist movement, in some respects, and I say this garbally, a very early form of a charismatic type of movement. It raises questions about the work of the Holy Spirit.

How does one know when the Spirit is at work, and so on. And then we also look at a very important issue, which is the formation of the canon. How did the early church come to the conviction that there are 27 books, and only 27 books, that should be added to the Old Testament?

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