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Teaching Notes

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## **A.C.T.S. Church History Seminar**

### **Week 2: Christological Controversies and Augustine (325-590)**

#### I. The Imperial Church: Constantine Takes Over

##### A. Church Life Before Constantine

###### 1. "A church of slaves"

***1 Corinthians 1:26-27 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.***

Pagan critic Celsus: Christians were ignorant folk whose teaching took place, not in schools nor in open forums, but in kitchens, shops, and tanneries.

Actually (despite the fact that Tertullian, Justin, Clement and Origen were scholars) most early Christians were from the lower echelons of society

###### 2. Early Christian worship

- a. celebration of Christ's resurrection
- b. communion: only for the baptized
- c. extensive teaching from Scripture: sometimes lasting for hours!!! [most folks illiterate, few copies of Scripture]
- d. some worship in catacombs: at first to signify unity with martyrs, later for protection
- e. most worship in private homes

###### 3. Churches grew larger: "fragmentum" [piece of communion bread from other churches in city]

###### 4. Baptism classes: sometimes lasting THREE YEARS... "catechumens"

time to be instructed in Christian doctrine

time to give signs of genuine conversion & repentance

baptism usually administered once/year... Easter Sunday

on coming out of water: given white robes (Revelation 3:4), water to drink (cleansed inside/outside), anointed (part of Royal Priesthood), milk & honey (Promised Land)

5. Fish Symbol: ΙΧΘΥΣ “ICTHUS” = Iesu Christo Theos Huios Soterior (Jesus Christ God, Son, Savior)

## B. Church Life Under Constantine

1. No persecution
2. “Official theology”
3. Deluge of “new believers”
4. Great new basilicas, ornately decorated churches [Empress Helena & the Holy Land]; beginnings of official Christian art
5. Marriage of pagan holidays with Christian meaning (e.g. Christmas Day)
6. More ornate worship: ministerial garments, incense, official gestures of respect for Roman officials, processions, choirs, reduction in congregational participation
7. Official honor for martyrs: anniversary dates, shrines, relics
8. Pilgrimages to Holy Land [Empress Helena again!]
9. Infant baptism

## C. Eusebius of Caesarea: Official Theology

“Looking westward or eastward, looking over the whole earth, and even looking at heaven, always and everywhere I see blessed Constantine leading the same Empire.” Eusebius of Caesarea

1. Eusebius: born c.260 in Palestine
2. Experienced persecution early in life... his mentor and personal friends were martyred
3. Through all this, wrote his *Church History*... collected, organized, published practically all of the stories we have of the early church (e.g. Martyrdom of Polycarp)
4. Constantine’s “conversion,” Edict of Milan something like the Exodus for the church
5. Thought Constantine = “God’s chosen instrument”
6. Elected Bishop of Caesarea; became embroiled in debate over Arianism

7. After Constantine's death, he finished his *Church History*: defense of Christianity as the ultimate goal of all human history (especially within context of Roman Empire)
8. Constantine's conversion & activity in religious disputes seen as keystone to entire structure: Christian Faith and Roman Empire were compatible
9. Eusebius took great pride in ornate church buildings: BUT failed to see effect it was having on church life (now development of clerical aristocracy; ruler priests; not church of common people)
10. Failed to see "coming Kingdom of God"... seemed to say "plan of God is now fulfilled"
11. De-emphasized second coming of Christ; Christ HAS ALREADY triumphed over enemies

BUT not everyone was so optimistic!! Monks fled the "official church", Donatists started their own new church

#### D. Monasticism

##### 1. Biblical

**Men:** *Matthew 19:10-12* **The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." <sup>11</sup> Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."**

**Women:** *1 Timothy 5:9-12* **No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, <sup>10</sup> and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. <sup>11</sup> As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. <sup>12</sup> Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge.**

2. "White martyrs" [when true martyrdom no longer possible]
3. First monks of the desert "monk" from Greek "monarchos" = "solitary"
4. Anthony
  - a. came into a church & heard Christ's words to rich young ruler

**Matthew 19:21** **"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven."**

- b. left for the desert

- c. found an old man in a cave already living the solitary life... learned from him
- d. many times tempted to go back to society... regretted having sold his goods
- e. fasted all the more... sometimes went days without food/water
- f. left old man, went to live totally alone in a cemetery; lived on bread some kind souls brought him
- g. wrestled with demonic visions; left him bruised & sore for days
- h. God spoke in a vision not to fear... he would always be provided for
- i. moved even further into the desert; continued to battle the devil
- j. soon younger men joined him and he trained them in monasticism
- k. became "Father of Monasticism"

#### E. Donatism

- 1. Large group broke off from "official church"... started their own; elected their own bishop of Carthage, Donatus
- 2. Key issue: purity of the church (what to do with the "lapsed"... those who had failed during the persecutions; also could a man who'd handed over Scripture to the Roman government be able to ordain a bishop?)
- 3. Carthage (North Africa, modern Libya) the center of Donatism
- 4. Conversion of Constantine gave strength to movement: desire for a pure church
- 5. Eventually died out; Augustine answered theological questions raised about nature of church

## II. Christological Controversy: Arianism and Athanasius

### A. Arianism [ancient "Jehovah's Witnesses"]

- 1. Arius: "presbyter" of Alexandria (Egypt)... issue: was the Word of God (Christ) co-eternal with God

Arius: "There was when He was not" (i.e. there was a time when Christ did NOT exist)

- 2. Alexander, bishop of Alexandria opposed Arius... said Christ was co-eternal with God

3. Theological controversy turned political... each side had their official allies... soon there were riots in the streets
4. Eastern empire threatened to be divided by issue
5. Constantine intervened, called “Council of Nicea” together (A.D. 325)

#### B. The Council of Nicea (A.d. 325)

1. City in Asia Minor near Constantinople
2. Maybe 318 bishops summoned to decide issue
3. Constantine (still un-baptized] presided over Council]
4. Generally positive feelings by having all these bishops together
5. BUT Arian controversy loomed
6. Many wranglings... eventually printed creed that rejected Arianism

#### Nicean Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human, suffered, and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit

But those who say there was when He was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from that which is not, or that the Son of God is of different substance [*hypostasis*] or essence [*ousia*], or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes.

#### C. Athanasius of Alexandria

1. Alexander’s right-hand man at Nicea... called “the black dwarf” (dark skin color, very short in stature)
2. Alexander died in 328... the battle was just beginning; many bishops went back to their home areas and ignored ruling

3. Before the Arian controversy broke out, Athanasius had written *On the Incarnation of the Word*
4. Arian leaders marked him as their chief adversary... began to persecute him

#### D. Final Victory

### III. The Greatest Teacher of the Church: Augustine of Hippo

GREAT are you, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is your power, and of your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of your creation, desires to praise you, man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that you “resist the proud,” — yet man, this part of your creation, desires to praise you. You move us to delight in praising you; **for you have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you?** St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter 1, Section 1.

#### A. A Tortured Path to Faith: Augustine’s Conversion

#### B. Theological conflicts: Manicheism, Donatism, Pelagianism

“Against the skepticism of the **Academics** Augustin urges that man needs the knowledge of truth for his happiness, that it is not enough merely to inquire and to doubt, and he finds a foundation for all our knowledge, a foundation invulnerable against every doubt, in the consciousness we have of our sensations, feelings, our willings, and thinking, in short, or all our psychical processes. From the undeniable existence and possession by man of some truth, he concludes to the existence of God as the truth per se; but our conviction of the existence of the material world he regards as only an irresistible belief.

Combating **heathen religion and philosophy**, Augustin defends the doctrines and institutions peculiar to Christianity, and maintains, in particular, against the **Neo-Platonists**, whom he rates most highly among all the ancient philosophers, the Christian theses that salvation is to be found in Christ alone, that divine worship is due to no other being besides the triune God, since he created all things himself, and did not commission inferior beings, gods, demons, or angels to create the material world; that the soul with its body will rise again to eternal salvation or damnation, but will not return periodically to renewed life upon the earth; that the soul does not exist before the body, and that the latter is not the prison of the former, but that the soul begins to exist at the same time with the body; that the world both had a beginning and is perishable, and that only God and the souls of angels and men are eternal. —

Against the dualism of the **Manichaeans**, who regarded good and evil as equally primitive, and represented a portion of the divine substance as having entered into the region of evil, in order to wage war against and conquer it. Augustine defends the monism of the good principle, or of the purely spiritual God, explaining evil as a mere negation or privation, and seeking to show from the

finiteness of the things in the world, and from their differing degrees of perfection, that the evils in the world are necessary, and not in contradiction with the idea of creation; he also defends in opposition to Manichaeism, and **Gnosticism** in general, the Catholic doctrine of the essential harmony between the Old and New Testaments.

Against the **Donatists**, Augustin maintains the unity of the Church.

In opposition to **Pelagius** and the **Pelagians**, he asserts that divine grace is not conditioned on human worthiness, and maintains the doctrine of absolute predestination, or, that from the mass of men who, through the disobedience of Adam (in whom all mankind were present potentially), have sunk into corruption and sin, some are chosen by the free election of God to be monuments of his grace, and are brought to believe and be saved, while the greater number, as monuments of his justice, are left to eternal damnation."

Pelagianism: Sin and Freedom; Grace and Salvation

[from Augustine's Confessions, Book X, Chapter 29 NPNF 1:153]

And my whole hope is only in your exceeding great mercy. Give what You command, and command whatever You will. You impose sexual purity upon us, "Nevertheless, I when I perceived," said someone, "that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me;... that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was. . . . O charity, my God, kindle me! You command sexual purity; give what You command, and command what You wilt.

Note: A certain monk named Pelagius heard about this statement by Augustine and was outraged... he believed in the basic goodness and morality of man, and felt that if God commanded us to do something, it was up to us alone to do it

I believe that monk, Pelagius, has missed the central idea of Romans 1-3... apart from God, we have no righteousness of our own... we are enslaved to sin and go on sinning forever... therefore, if God doesn't fulfill in us what He commands, we will never be righteous

God commands righteousness... absolute, perfect righteousness! We are slaves to sin from our birth in Adam, argues Paul; Pelagius argued that we are totally free to sin or not to sin

Augustine clearly understood the implications of salvation by grace alone, and of predestination

C. The "City of God": The Fall of Rome and the Plan of God

D. Sacramentalism

E. Writings and Influence

## IV. The End of an Era: Rome Falls

- A. The Barbarian Kingdoms
- B. Conquered to Convert
- C. Roman Missions: Ulfilas, Patrick, Boniface
- D. A New Order
  - 1. West: Barbarian Influx
  - 2. East: the Citadel of Constantinople
  - 3. East and West Drifting Apart

## VI. Final Christological Controversies: Chalcedon

- A. Deity of Christ Settled: Nicea (325) & Constantinople (381)
- B. BUT How Are Two Natures of Christ Related??
  - 1. Alexandria and Antioch: Conflicting Centers of Christianity
  - 2. Nestorius: Questions About Mary
  - 3. "Robber Synod": Ephesus (449)
    - a. Eutyches, and Dioscoros
    - b. Pope Leo's envoys manhandled