

Wk2 Martyrdom/Asceticism

We will look at the early Christian martyrs and how a life defined by martyrdom was essential for early Christian spirituality. We will also investigate the legalisation of and cultural transition to Christianity during Constantine's reign and the concept of "white" and "red" martyrdom. Key figures here are Polycarp, Perpetua, Sadhu Sigh, and Antony of Alexandria

Stories of Martyrs: Polycarp & Perpetua

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you . . .

John 15:20

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

Effects of Persecution on the Early Church:

Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD with the Edict of Milan

Effects of Legalization on the Early Church

Antony of Alexandria:

- Son of a wealthy family
- Parents died when he was 20
- Followed Matthew 19:21 literally
- Lived an ascetic life in the wilderness

"Red, or Blood, Martyrs" = Martyrs who suffer physical violence for their faith in Christ

"White, or Bloodless, Martyrs" = Martyrs who suffer spiritual violence for their faith in Christ.

Aspects of a bloodless martyr

- Identify with Christ
- View Complacency through Comfort as the Silent Killer (C.S. Lewis *Screwtape Letters*, 7, 25, 28)
- Embrace Suffering
- Discipline the Flesh

²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

“God is ingenious in making us crosses. He makes them of iron and of lead, which are heavy in themselves. He makes them out of straw which seems to weigh nothing, and which are no less difficult to carry. He makes them of gold and of precious stones, which dazzle the spectators, which excite the envy of the public, but which crucify no less than the crosses which are most despised.” (Fenelon, *Christian Perfection*, 16)

Biblical warnings about extreme asceticism Colossians 2:16–23 (ESV)

“For the sake of this one vice – that is, the love of praise – these men suppressed the love of riches and many other vices.” [Augustine, V.13, p.163]

“The devil laughs. He is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste, and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride.”
(Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 112)

Nokseng, Assam India: “I have decided to follow Jesus”

Resources:

The Voice of the Martyrs Website: persecution.com

Athanasius of Alexandria. *The Life of Saint Antony*. Holy Nativity Press, 2023.

Davey, Cyril. *Story of Sadhu Sundar Singh*. Beacon Hill Press, 1992.

DC Talk, and The Voice of the Martyrs. *Jesus Freaks: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus*. Albury Publishing, 1999.

Elliot, Elizabeth. *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1989.

Jie, Hu, dir. *Songs from Maidichong*. Documentary. 2014. 82 mins.

Montonera, Andrews. *By Life or By Death: The Life and Legacy of John and Betty Stam*. Moody Publishers, 2024.