

VI. Laws of Divine Establishment and the Royal Family Honor Code: The Antonine Caesars

The Antonine Caesars. The cultivation of doctrine into the souls of believers at Ephesus and Philippi provided the invisible historical impact which withstood the evils of Nero and the Flavian Caesars who follow him.

The Church Age's original missionary thrust occurred in Jerusalem led by the apostle James whose ministry was directed toward the Jews. The message was for the most part rejected. Israel shirked its duty as a client nation and most of its efforts in missions never made much of an impact far beyond its own borders. The Jews preferred the lie of legalistic ritual which insured their ultimate fate at the hands of Titus, the Flavian general who destroyed the city of Jerusalem in the summer of A.D. 70.

God recognized the positive volition surfacing among citizens of the Anatolian peninsula and those to its west and assigned Paul the task of evangelizing them.

The area was called Asia Minor by the Romans and it fell at the crossroads between the eastern and western portions of the Empire which encompassed many peoples and nationalities. God was ready to take the Gospel to the Gentiles in a world-wide missionary outreach and His starting point was Western Anatolia and its capital of Ephesus.

The large number of positive believers which developed in Ephesus and later Philippi became the catalyst for one of history's greatest periods of freedom and prosperity. Rome entered its Golden Age under the leadership of the Antonine Caesars. The Antonine Dynasty provided the perfect environment for the growth of Christianity and its expansion throughout Europe. There were six Antonine emperors, the first five being known as the Good Emperors.

Eusebius \Eu-se-be-us\ assigns the Apostle John's exile to Patmos, and consequently the writing of the book of Revelation, to the latter part of the reign of Domitian \Da-mish-un\. Irenaeus \I-re-ne-us\ wrote in the year 180 of the book of Revelation, "It was seen, not a long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian." This testimony is confirmed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen \Ahr-a-gan\, and later writers.

Following the assassination of Domitian in A.D. 98, the Roman Senate chose Marcus Cocceius Nerva \Kak-se-us Ner-va\ as emperor. He reigned only two years and had no natural heir. Therefore, Nerva adopted the son of one of his famous generals, Marcus Ulpius Traianus \Tra-ya-nus\, who became known as Trajan. He ruled from 98-117.

Trajan spent sums on both military and domestic projects. He built roads, harbors and public buildings, including libraries, a forum and baths. Also constructed was a new aqueduct and a highway named the Trajan Way.

In law he made a number of improvements. Anonymous accusations were prohibited. Fathers who maltreated their sons were obligated to set them free. Defendants who were condemned in absentia were given the right to a new trial.

Trajan's military exploits took him all the way to the Persian Gulf where he was said to have observed, "*I should certainly have crossed over to India if I were still young.*" On his return to Rome, he died on the island of Sicily of complications resulting from a stroke.

The Romans later regarded his administration as the apex of the early empire. Roman historian Publius Florus wrote that the empire had been rejuvenated by Trajan. Fourth century historian Eutropius \Eu-tro-pe-us\ observed that the highest compliment the Senate could pay to an emperor was to hail him as "more fortunate than Augustus and better than Trajan."

Before his death, Trajan had adopted his cousin, Publius Hadrianus \Hay-dre-aye-nus\, and named him Hadrian \Ha-dre-an\. He ruled the Empire from 117-138. Hadrian had no natural heir so he adopted his son-in-law, a senator named Titus Aurelius Antoninus \An-ta-ni-nas\. His reign lasted from 136-161. He became known in history as Antoninus Pius and it is from him that the Antonine Caesars received their appellation.

Of the Antonines, arguably Antoninus Pius was the best. He was both handsome and intelligent with unquestioned integrity. As a public speaker he possessed great eloquence without being pretentious. The minimum rate of interest was 4 percent and he never allowed to go higher.

Antoninus had such great thoughtfulness of those over whom he ruled he was said to have protected their possessions as if they were his own.

In a stroke of common sense, which our leaders should seek to emulate, Antoninus fired government bureaucrats whom he said were being paid for doing nothing. He dismissed them with the castigation, “*There is nothing meaner or more hard-hearted than for a man to gnaw away at the Republic while he renders it no service by his own work.*” Many of his public works survive today: the temple and tomb of Hadrian, the temple of Agrippa, the amphitheater at Rome, a bridge called the Pons Sublicius \Pones Sue-ble-ke-us\ (literally, a bridge built upon piles), the Pharos Island lighthouse, the harbor at Caieta \Ka-ye-ta, the port at Terracina \Ter-ah-che-na\, the baths at Ostia \Ahs-tee- ah\, the aqueduct at Antium \An-she-um\ (known today as Anzio), and the temples at Lanuvium \La-nyu-ve-um\.

Following the death of Antoninus a coregency between Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus ruled Rome until the death of Verus in 169. This proved crucial because Marcus adopted his own son, Lucius Aurelius, an unfortunate character who was known as Commodus. The final Antonine Caesar reigned from 180-192. He was a disaster. In twelve short years he was able to bring an end to the Golden Age of Rome.

Nevertheless, our Lord accomplished several important things during the 150 or so years following His ascension. The apostles became organized and began their missionary outreach and the establishment of local churches. A large Pivot materialized at Ephesus in the east and its environs, and in Philippi in the west. John completed the canon of Scripture. The Antonine’s provided the environment of freedom in which the gospel could be easily communicated throughout the empire.

The one man who more than any other provided the spiritual leadership which enabled Christendom to capitalize on these advantages was the Apostle Paul.

Paul conducted four missionary journeys, the first of which began at Antioch and was centered in southeastern Anatolia. The second missionary journey was a very critical moment in the history of western civilization. This was when Paul took his missionary outreach into Europe. Positive volition in Europe made it the hot spot for orthodox theology while the east would eventually be deluded by the Satanic counterfeit of Islam.

NOTE: Explain Transparencies: (1) EB (18:785): Turkey ; (2) Scofield: Map 8; and (3) Harper Atlas (172-73): Paul’s Missionary Journeys.

When Paul crossed the Hellespont, he began a process which would eventually see a westward movement of the Pivot. Neither the Middle East nor Europe would ever be the same again. With this westward movement, the target of missionary activity changed from the Jews to the Gentiles. Positive volition by the various Gentile peoples of the west would bring prosperity to Europe while religion would impoverish the east.

Believers at Ephesus and Philippi became the fulcrum of the Church Age’s first Pivot. Consistently submissive to the teachings of Paul and his proteges, these two groups of believers provided the invisible source of stability for Rome during the reign of the Antonine’s. From there, the lineage of the royal family began its inexorable journey through Europe.

Their Historical Impact: The invisible impact of these two congregations provided the impetus for the Pivot to move westward. It was revitalized by the Protestant Reformation which became the catalyst for its journey across the Atlantic to Colonial America. In the February 20th issue of National Review, Forrest McDonald makes an interesting observation in his review of Barry Alan Shain’s new book, *The Myth of American Individualism*:

McDonald, Forrest. “What Formed the Founders.” National Review. 20 Feb. 1995, p. 66:

Two features of Shain's work make it especially valuable. One is the thoroughness with which he has built his case on primary sources, especially sermons and political tracts, as well as on secondary literature. The other is his location of the origins of Americans' values: not in classical republicanism, nor in rational humanism, but in reformed Protestant Christianity.

What delivered the believers at Philippi from Nero's tyranny? Several factors which we have noted to this point:

They had been consistently submissive to Paul's teachings over a long period of time. Paul crossed the Hellespont in the mid to late 40s, so it was about 15 years later when he wrote the Philippian epistle to his original European converts.

During this decade and a half of study, these believers advanced to spiritual maturity through spiritual photosynthesis.

After having believed in Jesus for salvation, they began the process of cultivating their souls with the water of the Word of God.

This renovation of their streams of consciousness resulted in a harvest of maximum doctrinal thinking leading toward deliverance from persecution.

The key word in the context is *katergazomai*, which means that in the process of spiritual cultivation, they did the work necessary to fortify their souls.

Therefore, when they were forced to confront the terrors of Nero's persecutions, some four years after Paul's letter to them, they were able to stand fast under the pressure.

Divine protection enabled these people to survive into the reign of the Antonines.

During this time of prosperity, they took advantage of their freedom to evangelize the unbeliever and teach doctrine to the saved.

The historical ramifications of their efforts are made obvious in this excerpt from:

Harrison, R. K. ed. Major Cities of the Biblical World. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985; pp. 206-07:

It was in Philippi ... that the gospel first took root in Europe. Like the leaven of Jesus' parable, it grew slowly but surely, gradually to become the dominant force in the region, as, indeed, throughout the empire. At the beginning of the fourth century A.D., the Roman ruler Galerius \Ga-lir-e-us\ settled in Thessalonica. In 303 he and the emperor Diocletian \Di-a-kle-shen\ initiated the most famous of all the persecutions of the Christian faith throughout the empire. But it was too late. Christianity had become too much a part of the lives of the people in the provinces. In spite of the severity of the persecution, "the blood of the martyrs" was indeed "the seed of the church." Galerius was forced to issue an edict of toleration on his deathbed (A.D. 311).

In 313 Constantine became emperor and with his fellow ruler in the east issued the Edict of Milan, which granted Christianity the same legal standing as other religions for the very first time. In 330, Constantine moved the official capital of the empire to Byzantium \Ba-zan-she-um\ (renamed Constantinople), thus transferring the center of power to the Greek territories. Within two generations Christianity had almost totally replaced the old paganism of both the west and the east.

It is for these deliverances which the Philippians of A.D. 60 are preparing as they cultivate their souls under the teachings of Paul.

Philippians 2:12 - So then my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only but now much more in my absence, be cultivating your own preservation in danger with reverence and respect.

The major English translations all conclude this verse with the words “*fear and trembling*.” The words which are translated are, in the Greek: *phobos + tremos*

The translation is absolutely correct. But the cultivation of our souls under the authority of the Scriptures is not to be considered something which generates fear and trembling. This is idiomatic for “*reverence and respect*.” This can be seen in the context of the following verses:

Ecclesiastes 12:13 - Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man.

The idiomatic nature of this expression can be seen in:

Psalms 19:9 - The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

The Scofield Study Bible indicates the following in an accompanying footnote (NAS, p. 761): “The fear of the Lord” is an O.T. expression meaning reverential trust . . .

The idiom is stated again in:

Psalms 111:10 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ...

Again, in Scofield’s marginal reference, we see the word reverence. This statement is repeated in Proverbs 9:10, and in Proverbs 15:16 and Proverbs 15:33, we yet again see Scofield’s marginal commentary of reverence. In Proverbs 15:33 we see an additional thought which adds an interesting doctrine into this discussion:

Proverbs 15:33 - The fear [reverence for] the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility.