

# Imperial Persecutions

by Robin Boisvert

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*The sermon explores the imperial persecutions of Christians in the Roman Empire, highlighting the causes, responses, and consequences of these events.*

**Duration:** 49:59

**Scripture:** Acts 8:30

**Topics:** "Persecution"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the context of the Roman Empire during the second and third centuries AD. The Empire was vast, stretching from Britain to Persia, but it was also facing challenges from barbarian hordes at its borders. The speaker emphasizes that despite the decline in economics and moral life, the church is a school for sinners and a society of saints. The mention of Constantine highlights the mingling of church and state during this time.

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## Transcript

The topic today is imperial persecutions and you might want to write in next to that 250 to 311 AD, 312 AD, because that's a period we're going to talk about. It's not exactly proper to limit imperial persecutions to this period. They did occur a little bit before this time too, but were rather intermittent.

But what we have beginning with Decius in particular, we're going to look at in a moment, was an emperor who by settled policy, empire-wide, initiated a persecution. And what were the causes for it? Well, the church had undergone a period of amazing growth a lot of people were turning to Christ. Now some, I think it would be safe to say, maybe entered into fellowship with the church without considering really what it meant.

As you see that happening during times of peace and prosperity that, hey, Christians look like nice people, looks like they're prospering, I think I'll attach myself to this group. I think that was certainly going on at the time. So I don't think we can say that, well, everybody that had become a Christian at this time was, you know, deeply pious.

As a matter of fact, we're going to find out that with very little intimidation at all, there were those that ran away from the faith during persecution. But the church was growing at the time and especially growing among some of the lower classes. Also along with this, there was a sharp decline in the economics and moral life of the Roman Empire.

It is decaying from within and all of what we're talking about is within the context right now of the Roman Empire. At this time, the empire stretched all the way from Britain in the northwest to Persia in the southeast. It encompassed all of North Africa, the entire Mediterranean Basin.

As a matter of fact, the Mediterranean Sea was called the Roman Lake. It was vast. And yet around the edges, you see things starting to break down.

Barbarian hordes pushing from Asia into Eastern Europe were pressing at the northern and eastern borders of the empire. I just remember the movie *Gladiator*, remember how it started out with Maximus fighting a battle there against the German barbarians and the hordes that were there. And that was about 180 AD.

So there's cracks in the empire now. And there's been a decline in economics and moral life. And let us see with the approaching 1,000th anniversary of Rome, many reflected on the empire's problems and concluded that it was due to a lack of unity.

Christians were considered the chief offenders. Rome's declined due to the displeasure of the gods with the progress of Christianity. From the Roman perspective, these Christians were strange people.

They didn't really play ball with the higher goals of society. They didn't involve themselves in some of the things that the majority of the Roman people did and appreciated. They didn't participate in pagan feasts.

They didn't participate in the entertainment of the gladiatorial games and such things. They kept to themselves. They were different.

Not only that, they were exclusive. We Romans would admit a whole pantheon of gods, but they deny any other gods except their own. They also have this kind of moral superiority about them and feel like they're looking down on us.

And undoubtedly, there was some self-righteousness, but generally speaking, they were more righteous than their neighbors. Anyway, all this was certainly noticed. Here's a quote from Ray Petrie.

The year 249, the 1,000th anniversary of Rome's legendary founding, touched off a painful review by historians, social critics, government officials, and the people themselves of Roman greatness that was no more. Suspicion that the church was a state within the state and therefore dangerous. And it was indeed true that the church had developed its own parallel administrative infrastructure, complete with office bearers, laws, councils, etc.

So if you're a citizen of the Roman Empire and you're wondering why are things seeming to fall apart here, perhaps it's because of the Christians. That's just a little bit of the background here. Then we look at Roman numeral two.

There's a couple of Roman emperors that we're going to look at, Decius and Valerian. Decius, in around 250 AD, ordered, this is not on your outline, but he ordered a systematic persecution of the church. It was actually very shrewd.

He wasn't aiming at martyrs, he was aiming to produce apostates. And his method was to require by imperial decree that every person in the empire be able to produce a certificate called a libellus, a certificate that indicated or proved that one had sacrificed to the pagan gods before the commissioners.

They would then receive this certificate and there actually are, the Sands of Egypt have preserved a number of these libeli, so we know exactly what was going on.

And you would be required to produce this certificate to show that you had indeed sacrificed to the pagan gods, something of course which no Christian would be able to do. So that was his approach. And then upon failure to produce this certificate, you would be subject to various forms of persecution, depending on your status in society.

You might be degraded from being a noble to someone lesser. If you were a slave, you'd be deprived of your freedom, deprived of your property, and then in increasing ways, you could be deprived of even your life. Decius was an emperor of the old school.

He was a persecutor, not from impulse, but from settled policy. He honestly believed that the salvation of Rome lay in its old institutions and that Christianity as a rival power could not be too speedily or effectually crushed. He's credited with saying he would rather have a second emperor at his side rather than the bishop of Rome.

The result of this persecution was quite serious, especially in the internal divisions that it produced. But I'd like to just maybe go on a little bit here to the end of the 250s AD. There was a lull after Decius.

He didn't last too long. He died in battle. He was succeeded by another emperor and then by Valerian.

And Valerian, for the first few years of his reign, was actually quite favorable to the Christians. But then, under evil influences, he changed his ways and renewed the persecution that had started under Decius. And it happened in a couple of stages.

First stage was the removal of bishops. Assemblies of Christians were forbidden. And then the second stage, office bearers were immediately put to death.

Other Christians suffered confiscation, banishment. The bishop of Rome, Sixtus, was beheaded in his Episcopal chair. And Cyprian of North Africa was also martyred during this time.

I'm going to come back to Cyprian in a moment because he's a very important figure during this period. But let's look at the effects of the persecution. This is what happened.

When these imperial decrees went forth and when it was required that there be the production of this certificate, different people responded in different ways. There were those who failed or who apostatized to varying degrees during the persecution. And then, following the persecution, wished to be reinstated into the church.

They were called the lapsed. And I have a few phrases here in italics. Notice the effects of persecution, the lapsed.

Number one, there were many different shades and degrees of those denying the faith. Some sacrificed to the emperor under duress and sacrificed to the gods, I should say. But in some sense, it was the same thing.

They would sacrifice some under duress. Others turned over copies of the scriptures. They had a special designation.

They were called traitors. Some fled. Some had their slaves sacrifice for them.

Some merely bought the libelous without having sacrificed at all. And some sacrificed willingly. So there are all these different kinds of situations.

And then added difficulties. Upon desiring reinstatement, many had no real sense of sin for having denied the faith. And then, to further complicate things, the practice of allowing those who had remained steadfast to intercede for the lapsed.

They were called confessors. So imagine, if you will, you're in Carthage, for instance, and your uncle was apprehended, failed to produce the certificate, was taken to prison, and suffered tremendous torture and persecution, but came out of it alive. And he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Okay? After the persecution is lifted and it's no longer dangerous to be a Christian, all these people who denied the Lord want to come back into the church. Not so fast, you say. This has to be regulated.

There were actually three sins in the ancient church that seemed to have emerged as especially egregious. And those were murder, adultery, and apostasy. And it's generally thought that, well, only the Lord can forgive those.

We'll pray for you and intercede that hopefully at the judgment seat you can be forgiven. But we don't know that that's really possible. That was kind of the general picture.

So apostasy was considered to be very serious. But let's say somebody sacrificed to the gods only after being cut and wounded and harmed in some way. Well, that's a little bit different than somebody that just said, hey, if I pay you enough money, Mr. Official, will you give me one of those things? And then, you know, there were all kinds of things in between.

Well, this caused a lot of problems when persecution lifted. And then there's the other idea of, well, you know, how to regulate this. The bishop of the church, shouldn't he have a say in this? Well, this brings us back to this guy Cyprian.

Anybody ever heard of Cyprian? He's actually one of the more significant early church fathers. Cyprian was a bishop in Carthage. Carthage was the major city in the Latin or Western portion of North Africa.

Carthage is actually an area that we're hearing a lot about these days, Libya and Tunisia. That's that same part of the world. Carthage was actually very close to Italy.

It wasn't far at all to cross the Mediterranean from Carthage to the boot of Italy. That wasn't far at all. As a matter of fact, Carthage was an area that produced a lot of grain that would then be shipped to Italy, to Rome, to feed them there.

Well, Cyprian was a man of shining parts. He had great ability. He was a wealthy man.

And upon his conversion in sometime like around maybe in the 240s AD, he gave away his vast wealth. He had so many great abilities that he was actually made bishop by popular acclaim. This is something that would happen once in a while.

The other great figure that this happened to was, of course, Augustine. But Cyprian was such an impressive man that he was made bishop by public acclaim. And there were those that were jealous about

this.

But he became the bishop. He had great administrative ability. When the persecution hit, Cyprian took literally Jesus' words, when they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.

And that's just what he did. He fled to another place where he continued to exercise his authority, his pastoral authority, from a remote location. He wrote some 80 letters or something to try to care for the flock during this time.

Well, when the persecution lifted after Decius in the early 250s and Cyprian came back, there were those that thought that his flight was as a result of cowardice, not as a result of obedience to Jesus' words. And another rival bishop was elected during this time. So that was a little bit of a complicating factor for Cyprian.

Also, when it came time for people to be readmitted back into the church, there was such respect given to the confessors, those who had endured persecution without denying the Lord. They were given by many this special status of they could intercede for the lapsed and be the ones that determined who came back into the church or not. Cyprian, as a bishop, said, wait a minute.

What do you guys think you're doing? That's not the way to go about it at all. So this schism developed, and it took the name of a... Actually, it happened in Rome as well as in Carthage, and followed the name of one of the schismatic bishops there by the name of Novation, and that's where we get the Novationist schism. Now, schism is different from a heresy.

Heresy is sin against truth, but schism is really sin against love. When there are factions that develop and schisms take place, there's some kind of breakdown in unity. Cyprian took this very seriously and wrote a very important treatise called *On the Unity of the Church*, and this becomes a very, very important document in the early history of the church that really kind of determines a lot of what the church believed about itself really for the next thousand years.

In that treatise, Cyprian was a very quotable guy. He had lots of great sound bites. One of the things he said is, where the bishop is, there the church is.

He also said, he cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother. And what he is doing, of course, is he is emphasizing the importance of the unity of the church, and in effect, he is criticizing the schismatics who want to set up a different church. Now, the schismatics were those who had a more rigorous view of allowing people to reenter the church.

And Cyprian, to be fair, wasn't saying, hey, I'm the guy that gets to do it. He actually advocated, all the bishops need to get together, they need to talk about this and have some kind of a unified policy of how people are readmitted. But in Rome, the schism broke out there, and this novation became the leader of a rival group.

The other bishop there was a man named Cornelius. And then the question was, well, what do we do with people who, because after a while, the novation and schism kind of dwindled away. It did last for quite a while, but a lot of people wanted to come back into what we'll call the Catholic church with a small c. And the question was, do they need to be rebaptized to come back into the church? And some said, yes, they do.

They need to be rebaptized in order to be received back into fellowship with the church. And eventually what developed was this idea that they didn't need to be rebaptized because baptism does not depend upon the minister baptizing. The validity of it depends upon the form.

And the sacrament belongs to Jesus Christ, doesn't belong to the church. Augustine's going to pick this up over a century later, and it's going to be very important in our understanding of church and sacrament. But going back to the time that we're in right now, there's this really serious problem of internal struggles resulting from the persecution.

It was a tough issue. Just to finish out a little bit about Cyprian himself, a few years later under the emperor Valerian, the persecution renews. This time, Cyprian does not flee to another city.

He stays in Carthage and he dies a martyr's death. That enhanced his reputation through the ages. And his writings were very important, especially the Roman Catholic Church loved the writings of Cyprian because they exalted this idea of where the bishop is, there the church is.

And we're still a good ways away from a Roman pope, but the bishop of Rome eventually is going to emerge as the leading figure, the authority in the Roman Catholic Church. We're not exactly there right now. Okay.

So the worst legacy of this particular persecution was the internal divisions that it engendered. Yes. Did they have a full canon of Scripture at this time? Was it completely compiled? Yes and no.

Yes, in the sense that by this time, there's pretty much a collection of all the writings that are considered to be inspired. As far as in any kind of an authoritative way, it's the Council of Carthage in I think 397 AD before you have that officially recognized. Nevertheless, even before that, there is a recognized canon of Scripture.

And when we talk about heresy in the next couple of weeks, that's when we'll talk about that because that had to emerge because of heretical ideas. We had to have a canon that could measure what's truth and what's error. So that's a good question.

Right now, we're talking about not heresy, but we're talking about schism. And in back of this all is the question that really is still a very much of a question today with regard to the church. And this is how it's sometimes framed.

Maybe you've heard this. Is the church a society of saints or is it a school for sinners? Have you ever heard that question? Have you ever heard it framed that way? Yeah. Well, that's a good question.

What is the church? Is it supposed to be a society of saints? To affirm that, we have to say that, well, yeah, everybody that is a Christian is a saint, right? He's sanctified. You become a Christian, you're sanctified. Now, sanctification is also a process of becoming more Christlike, but there's definitely a sense in which you become a Christian, you're a saint.

You're saved. And this is one way to look at the church. But it's also true that we're sinners, aren't we? And the remains of sin or the sinful nature of the flesh are still with us.

And we get tempted and sometimes we fall in temptation. And so the church is also a school for sinners. You know, as I meet with people who want to become members of the church, you know, it's very often

the case that people come to the church, they see everybody looks so happy and worshipping the Lord and, you know, joy.

And, you know, new people can look around and say, wow, it looks like everybody's got their act together here. And I just, you know, boy, if they really knew what I was like, I said, hey, relax. Everybody's got something to do.

Everybody's got skeletons in their closets, OK? We all are dealing with things and we all have to grow. And sometimes, you know, Christian sin quite badly. The church is a school for sinners, but it's also a society of saints.

Now, what was pretty much, I think, the case in the ancient church is we could look back on it and read some of the writings in this, you know, second and third century and say, oh, man, it seems kind of legalistic. Like any of you ladies that have plaited your hair or wear gold or, you know, jewels or things like that, you're terribly worldly. You'd be kicked out of many of the churches in the second century.

There was definitely a legalistic strain in this whole idea of a society of saints perhaps was stronger. Well, the clash is going to come when these people who and this is serious, denying the Lord is serious. I mean, I don't know how I would respond if I was under threat of serious persecution.

I hope I would remain faithful to the Lord. But I don't know. You know, I hope I would.

But when these people, for varying various reasons, to some degree denied the Lord, how do we deal with them coming back into the church? And that is a very, very difficult. How do we deal with people that fall? How do we deal with people that that fail? You know, it's a question today. That's all I'm saying.

But it was it became a very acute question during a period of persecution in its aftermath. All right. What about we disciple to and reach out to who, for them, clothing or anything of that nature is insignificant to them as a culture? We're discipling.

How should we as saints approach that? Hmm. Oh, well, I don't know. I mean, I think as long as, you know, general modesty might look different in one culture than in another.

Yeah. And that's a great question, Francis. But I don't know that I could really do justice to it right now.

But I think every situation, you know, every situation requires wisdom. Yeah. Yeah.

I'm not sure what class I could answer that in. But but that's a that is a great question. It's something that missionaries have to have to deal with.

Well, let's fast forward here. Right now, we're in the late two fifties A.D. The next imperial persecution is going to occur in 303 A.D. under Diocletian, the emperor at the time. But you got about 40 years.

What some have called the 40 years peace when there was a great period of growth and expansion in the church because persecution virtually ceased, church buildings really for the first time begin to be built. Prior to this, there may have been some buildings here and there, but for the most part, Christians met wherever they could. And sometimes they met, you know, in places where they they were hiding.

But not from 260 to 300 A.D. And a lot of people come into the church during this period of time. The persecution that we're talking about now lasted from 303 to 313 A.D. That's 10 years of official imperial

persecution. This is the last and the most violent Diocletian is the name most associated with this because it began under his reign.

He was an emperor who ascended from the military ranks, as most of the emperors did during this time. I think from 27 B.C. to about 180 A.D., this kind of golden era of Rome, you had maybe 15 emperors during that time. I can't remember exactly the number, but the average reign for an emperor in that period, 27 B.C. to 180 A.D., I think the average reign is like 15 years for an emperor.

That's a long time in the ancient world. That's like 15 FDRs. Great stability during this period.

Great peace. Pax Romana. Rome is flourishing.

It's totally different from 180 A.D. up to the period we're considering now. I think in that period, you've got like about 25 emperors, average reign, maybe three or four years. And of those 25 emperors, I think three of them died natural deaths.

The rest, it was usually assassination or death in a military campaign. It was the soldiers that were emerging as emperors. And you have a change in the Roman Empire at this time.

Fewer and fewer Romans themselves are fighting in the battles. More and more mercenaries are being hired. And just the complexion of Rome is changing.

And we're still not to the end for the Roman Empire, but things are changing. Diocletian initiated some administrative reforms. He actually divided the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves.

He moved his imperial seat from Rome to Nicomedia over in the east, what is now Turkey. And it's the area where we would have developed Constantinople and then present day Istanbul. Rome continued to be the capital city in the west, Nicomedia in the east.

So you've got these two sides of Rome. And in each side, there is an emperor and then kind of a guy that's his secondary authority next to him, both in the east and in the west. And I'd like to actually read to you a little bit about the persecution from James Orr.

And this, as I have down here, began in 303, February 23rd. Find my place here. There was to be no halting or turning back, but measures were to be taken for the entire suppression of Christianity.

Proceedings began at daybreak on the day named by the demolition of the magnificent church at Nicomedia, one of the architectural ornaments of the city, and the burning of all copies of the scriptures found in it. Just a comment about the burning of copies of the scriptures. I mentioned the traditores were a particularly egregious form of the lapsed.

Copies of the scriptures were extremely precious. First of all, the cost of production was enormous because for the most part, the materials that scriptures were made with were often the skin of animals, sheep or goats, vellum or parchment. It'd be a very rich person because you have to slaughter a whole flock to be able to provide the material upon which to write.

And then there's the actual copying of the scriptures. They didn't have Xerox machines. So to employ people in this activity, just extremely expensive, so only the very wealthy.

And actually it was churches that had copies of the scriptures. And because not everyone could read, churches would have readers. And these readers were special persons who sometimes would be the ones that would have the copies of the scriptures, if they weren't stored at a church building, and they would read the scriptures.

So when it came to destroying copies of the scriptures, this was very, very serious indeed. Okay, the next day on February 24th, an edict was issued giving the signal for a general persecution. All churches were to be demolished.

All copies of the scriptures were to be burned. Christians holding official positions were to be degraded and deprived of civil rights. Others were to be reduced to the condition of slaves.

Slaves were made incapable of receiving their freedom. This first edict was aimed at, will be observed rather at the churches and the scriptures than the persons of the Christians. Disobedience was punished by degradation, not by death.

A second edict later in 303 ordered all clergy without option of sacrifice to be thrown into prison. Sometime after, a third edict was issued, yet more severe. The clergy in prison were required to sacrifice, and if they did not, they were to be compelled by every means of torture.

Finally, in AD 304, a fourth edict extended this law to the whole body of the Christians. The most fearful tortures were inflicted on the Christians to compel them to submit, and though death was not mentioned in the edict, it was, as we see from Eusebius, freely inflicted. The sweeping severity of this persecution is apparent from the rehearsal of these edicts alone.

Their publication as an addition persecution caused indescribable consternation. Immediately on the publication of the first, a soldier rashly tore it down with appropriate words, and for this act he was roasted over slow fire. Slow fire was the, if you really wanted to make a point, I mean burning is bad enough, but slow fire, that must have really hurt.

Special panic was created by the order for the surrender and destruction of the sacred scriptures. Scenes of addition persecution were repeated in new forms. Multitudes hastened at once to give up their copies of the scriptures.

Some palmed off on the officers worthless and heretical writings. Others more enthusiastic not only retained their scriptures but boasted of their possession and challenged the magistrates to do their worse. For those who for any reason gave up their scriptures, they were branded with and the antagonism toward these afterwards gave rise to a new schism, that of the Donatists.

The later edicts still further tried the faith and patience of the Christians. In Gaul and Britain, first under Constantius and then Constantine, the Christians enjoyed comparative peace, but throughout the rest of the empire the persecution raged with dreadful cruelty. Egypt and Palestine were specially afflicted.

Well, I could go on but I think you get the flavor of it here. In 305 AD Diocletian abdicated and he went back to his farm and his second in command Galerius assumed leadership of the eastern part of the empire and continued the persecution and it raged even more fearfully. It's believed by many that Galerius was actually the force behind it to begin with.

Galerius continued the persecution until in 311 when he was on his death bed. He issued an edict of toleration and appealed for the Christians to pray for him. I think he died a very agonizing death.

After his death there was a power struggle and eventually Constantine in the west met Maxentius outside of Rome at the famous battle at the Milvian bridge and that's where he had his vision and the vision went according to this. He saw this vision of a cross and under the words, in this sign conquer, and then he followed that up by having the sign of the cross put on the shields of his soldiers. They went out to battle, won the battle and the rest is history.

Now what do we make of this and was Constantine a Christian? I'm not sure. One thing is for sure that he did ascribe his victory in some way to the help of Christ and he after achieving victory and there was still more to go. If you read the history of this you really need a scorecard to keep track of what's going on because everybody is named either Constantius or Constantine or Maximin or Maxentius or Maximian and they all got names that just seem the same and it's like how do you figure it out? Well what we need to know is eventually Constantine comes out on top okay and he issues the edict of Milan 313 AD which clearly favored Christianity.

It restored property to the churches. He encouraged his subjects to embrace Christianity although it was not the official religion of the Roman Empire at this time. That didn't occur until the end of the fourth century under Theodosius.

I think it's 392 or 394 or something like that. But even though he didn't formally adopt Christianity as a state religion it virtually held that position and Constantine himself got very involved in church politics. Now this is I think very savvy, very canny on his part.

He realized that like everyone before him that agreement in the political sphere required agreement at the most ultimate levels and so he wanted there to be peace in the empire so he insisted that his subjects get along. The greatest example of this was the fact that the famous council of Nicaea referred to as the first general council of the church was called by Constantine and that was called to try to deal with the Arian heresy and we're going to talk about in the next couple of weeks we'll talk about some of these heresies in the ancient church and Constantine's name is going to come up again. That he was a great figure in ancient history cannot be denied and that he was considered by the church at that time to be a great champion of the church also cannot be denied.

After all if you and I were living through 10 years of severe persecution and a political leader comes on the scene and lifts the persecution and favors the church we'd all be singing his praises I'm sure but as the quote at the bottom of the page there indicates Brian Tierney the church had found a new champion the crucial question that arose at once was whether she had found a new master as well because this really is the beginning of the mingling of church and state and it's going to continue to be the issue as a matter of fact the study of western civilization could be a study of the history of the dynamics between the church and state. Jesus said you know render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's render to God the things that are God's and he in seed form gave us I think our marching orders as to how we're to view these things but as to how that was interpreted and how that worked out well that's really in many ways we can call that the story of church history. All right what was the effects of this on the church well they went from a persecuted status to a favored status this did pave the way for Catholic exclusiveness in dealing with heresies and sects and church and state become mingled to the point where Theodosius declared all heathen sacrifices to be high treason so by the end of the fourth century you have the tables absolutely

turned and the state with the approval of the church or the church with the approval of the state actually goes in some sense from persecuted status to in some ways persecutor although it's an oversimplification to say it just like that.

I'd like to say a few words about the Donatist schism because this is this is really the big schism in ancient church history the Novationist was small potatoes compared to this and it's the same kind of problem that we had after the Decian and Valerian persecutions the same kind of problem.

What was happening was that during the Diocletian persecution the bishop in this area of North Africa again we're in the Carthage area North Africa seems to be a hotbed for schism but the bishop and what was his name Mensurius he was the bishop of Carthage and again that's the most important city in western North Africa this guy cooperated with the authorities during the persecution by holding no public worship and he managed to placate the authorities by handing over copies of heretical writings okay so he is to some degree as a bishop playing ball with the authorities and trying I think I don't know you know maybe it was it was really wonderful wisdom at the time to moderate the effects of the persecution on his people well okay there were those however who who suffered as Christians

during this time and were put in prison and suffered some degree of torment and again we call those the confessors now the confessors and those who supported them were irritated at Mensurius they thought he was caving in ways that were not faithful and so they were criticizing him Mensurius had an archdeacon that was kind of like his second in command who didn't like these people criticizing his bishop and he actually went to the prison and tried to prevent the supporters of the confessors from bringing them food and that sort of thing so you can see there's some bad blood developing there and eventually Mensurius dies and the persecution is lifted and it's time for a new bishop to come forth and of course that would be Sicilian he would be the second one to you know the one to come

into Mensurius's position but he is disliked by the confessors and their followers there's some personal animosity that comes into this as well instead of supporting Sicilian these other folks elect their own bishop and they elect the bishop by the name of Majoranus he's going to be succeeded pretty soon after by this man named Donatus and Donatus is the one from whom the schism is named but another little interesting fact going on here the bishop that was promoted by the opposing faction this guy uh was a part of the household of a of a wealthy woman at the time named Lucilla and Lucilla and Sicilian had a conflict it's a personal conflict and this is what this is this is what happened i mean it sounds kind of silly now but uh Sicilian who was the archdeacon he criticized Lucilla because

she had this habit of during worship services bringing out the relic of a martyr a bone and lavishing kisses upon it with great affection this was considered to be an act of great piety apparently it was questionable whether the bone really belonged to the martyr or whether it was really a martyr who should be adored in this way so i can imagine that Lucilla is lavishing ostentatiously kisses upon this bone and Sicilian's over here thinking this is this this is driving me crazy and so he rebukes her sharply she becomes very offended then when it's time for the new bishop to emerge she has this other guy Majoranus that she props up and Sicilian is very unhappy about this this is some of the personal animosity that is often behind these disagreements well it's just a bit of background

knowledge for you it's kind of interesting i think anyway um majoranus i'll take questions in a minute majoranus because i'm on a roll if i lose my train of thought here i'll never get back on it uh majoranus uh somehow passes off the scene he's followed by donatus donatus is the dominant figure and for the next

40 years uh he becomes the significant figure in this rival donatus church so you have in carthage and the surrounding area two churches that do not disagree in doctrine their disagreement is whether or not the bishop of the let's call it the catholic church small c as distinct from the donatus church whether that bishop was actually appropriately a bishop because he had been a tradit perhaps a traditor okay turning over heretical volumes uh and sicilian when he was um voted in as

bishop he was consecrated by three other bishops one of whom was also accused of being a traditor okay we're around 314 a.d persecution has been lifted you've got this schism going on constantine is in charge and constantine says i want you all to get along i don't like this division so he calls for a council the council of arlis to investigate the matter and in investigating it they determine that sicilian and the orthodox or the catholic church is the true church the donatus church is ordered to to stop doing what they're doing but uh the donatus church they were they were the purists they were associated with the confessors they had suffered and they would be willing to continue to suffer for the truth so they're not going to go away quietly as a matter of fact they hold on to

their um their values their their their precepts here you know they think we're the we're the true we're the society of saints there's other guys over that's a school of sinners okay it's an oversimplification to put it that way but but that's kind of how things developed constantine tried to do his best to deal with this um and he called for this council again you have the emperor calling for a church council to decide this matter that when they decided he's going to use his political clout to enforce it over a period of time um the donatus church continues to develop sometimes it's persecuted okay uh sometimes it's not but both of these churches develop alongside one another and continue to grow and to some extent flourish until in the 600s seventh century both the catholic church and

the donatist church are wiped out under the influx of muslim hordes as islam sweeps across north africa and and then they're heard for heard from no more uh the donatist schism left a a real bad mark on things it went on for a long time uh hundred years later augustine who also is from this part of the empire is trying unsuccessfully to deal with this problem of schism and he's the one that said schism is a sin against love whereas heresy is a sin against truth and he did all that he could to try to remedy the situation but he was unsuccessful

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