



MONTANUS

*Prophet to an
Apostate Body of Christ*

In various ways has the Devil rivaled and resisted the truth.
Sometimes his aim has been to destroy the truth by defending it.
Tertullian, Against Praxeas, I.

JOHN D. CLARK, SR.

Montanus: Prophet to an Apostate Body of Christ
(The Iron Kingdom Series, Book Six)

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Author's Notes

I call the blending of Christians with Rome at the Council of Nicea in AD 325, “the Synthesis”.¹ The Synthesis was an epochal event in human history, for it introduced to the world Christianity, the religion which shaped Western culture and has been a major influence on cultures around the globe. To use the word *Christianity* in reference to the religion of Christians prior to 325 is anachronistic and misleading.² Therefore, where the authors who are quoted in this book use *Christianity* anachronistically, I have replaced it with a more appropriate and italicized word, adding a superscript ^a to indicate that the author's word was *Christianity*. For example, speaking of the religion of Christians before 325, Robert Payne wrote,

Christianity remained obstinately remote from the state cult.³

But since Christianity did not exist until 325 when it was instituted by Constantine, Payne's word *Christianity* is replaced with a more appropriate term, in italics, with a superscript ^a:

The Faith of believers^a remained obstinately remote from the state cult.

The phrase “the Faith of believers” does not misrepresent Payne's basic point. I will never intentionally misrepresent an author's meaning. On the contrary, I believe that “the Faith of believers” is what Payne meant by *Christianity*. However, he and virtually all other historians believe that the religion of Christianity began with Jesus and his apostles, which error burdens their writings with confusion. By replacing their anachronistic terms with words more in line with what they actually meant, I am only relieving their readers of that burden.

The word *Church*, a synonym for Christianity, is also anachronistic and misleading when used in a pre-Synthesis context. Therefore, it is replaced as well, but with a superscript ^b to indicate that the author's word

¹ Book 4 in this Series, The Synthesis, details how the Synthesis came about and what it entailed. It is available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

² William Tabbernee held to a somewhat similar standard in his book, *Prophets and Gravestones: An Imaginary History of Montanists and Other Early Christians*. “In this book, the use of words such as catholic and orthodox should not be taken as references to the institution of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches that became more institutionally defined and developed after 325.” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 3.

³ Robert Payne, *Ancient Rome* (New York: Ibook, 2001), 61.

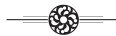
was *Church*. Likewise, when *Christian* is inappropriately used, it is replaced with an italicized word along with a superscript ^c:

- a Christianity
- b Church
- c Christian, Christians

For reasons that will be explained, certain terms related to Montanus are likewise replaced and designated with a superscript ^d or ^e, as shown below:

- d Montanist(s)
- e Montanism, Montanist Movement

- In English, there is no difference in the singular and plural forms of “you”. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the difference is obvious. To more accurately convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms, such as you, your, yours, yourselves.
- Translations of Old and New Testament scriptures are my own. Following standard practice, when a word is added to the translation for clarification, it is italicized.
- Punctuation appears inside quotation marks only when that punctuation is part of what is quoted. To include all periods and commas within quotation marks, as many grammarians demand, leaves too much room, in my opinion, for misrepresentation of the quoted material.



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BOOKS OF THE BIBLE AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

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| | | | |
|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------|
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| Exodus | Ex. | Song of Solomon | Song |
| Leviticus | Lev. | Isaiah | Isa. |
| Numbers | Num. | Jeremiah | Jer. |
| Deuteronomy | Dt. | Lamentations | Lam. |
| Joshua | Josh. | Ezekiel | Ezek. |
| Judges | Judg. | Daniel | Dan. |
| Ruth | Ruth | Hosea | Hos. |
| 1Samuel | 1Sam. | Joel | Joel |
| 2Samuel | 2Sam. | Amos | Amos |
| 1Kings | 1Kgs. | Obadiah | Obad. |
| 2Kings | 2Kgs. | Jonah | Jon. |
| 1Chronicles | 1Chron. | Micah | Mic. |
| 2Chronicles | 2Chron. | Nahum | Nah. |
| Ezra | Ezra | Habakkuk | Hab. |
| Nehemiah | Neh. | Zephaniah | Zeph. |
| Esther | Esth. | Haggai | Hag. |
| Job | Job | Zechariah | Zech. |
| Psalms | Ps. | Malachi | Mal. |
| Proverbs | Prov. | | |

New Testament Books

| | | | |
|----------------|---------|------------|-------|
| Matthew | Mt. | 1Timothy | 1Tim. |
| Mark | Mk. | 2Timothy | 2Tim. |
| Luke | Lk. | Titus | Tit. |
| John | Jn. | Philemon | Phlm. |
| Acts | Acts | Hebrews | Heb. |
| Romans | Rom. | James | Jas. |
| 1Corinthians | 1Cor. | 1Peter | 1Pet. |
| 2Corinthians | 2Cor. | 2Peter | 2Pet. |
| Galatians | Gal. | 1John | 1Jn. |
| Ephesians | Eph. | 2John | 2Jn. |
| Philippians | Phip. | 3John | 3Jn. |
| Colossians | Col. | Jude | Jude |
| 1Thessalonians | 1Thess. | Revelation | Rev. |
| 2Thessalonians | 2Thess. | | |

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Foreword

I believe the Bible. I trust it to be historically and prophetically true. I believe that Jesus is Lord of all, that he was born of the virgin Mary, that he suffered and died for our sins, that on the third day he was raised from the dead by the power of God, that he ascended into heaven to offer himself to God for our sins, that he will return at the appointed time to reign on earth a thousand years, and that in the Final Judgment, he will be the Judge of both the living and the dead. I believe that there is no hope of salvation except by faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus has filled me with his Spirit and taught me. I am his servant.

I also believe that the religious system known as Christianity is an abomination to both God and Christ. I believe that, to date, Christianity is Satan's crowning achievement, that by it, he has successfully divided and confused the body of Christ, and that he reigns over the flock of God through Christian ministers, though they do not realize it. And I believe that in order for God's people to attain to the unity and purity that Jesus prayed they would enjoy, they must come out of Christianity.

I am, by the wonderful grace of God, a follower of Jesus. I am also, by that same grace, not a Christian and not a part of what you know as Church religion.

The Iron Kingdom Series, of which this book is the sixth part, is an explanation and defense of my faith.

Introduction

As a seminary student studying Church history, Montanus intrigued me. As little as is actually known about him, and as castigated as he was, and still is, by Churchmen, he struck me as an important figure, even a true man of God. I said at the time that he was the one figure in Church history I would most like to meet and talk to. Four decades later, now as an aging pastor, I revisited the subject of Montanus, and once again, felt that he was a significant figure, one that must be considered if the truth about the development of Christianity is to be found.

What if Montanus was indeed sent by God to warn the body of Christ that they were headed in the wrong direction? What if he was not a heretic, but was exposing as false the deceivers that Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John all said would come and lead many believers astray? And what if leaders of Christianity had allowed the writings of Montanus and those with him to remain? Were those writings so convincing that Church leaders could not allow them to survive?

Because almost nothing directly from Montanus remains, we are left with more questions than answers about him and the believers with him. Nevertheless, I am convinced that he had something from God that would have benefitted believers, had it been received. Accordingly, this book about Montanus differs from any other I have found, for it assumes that he was sent by God to a body of Christ which had fallen into apostasy.



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Chapter One

Why Montanus?

No Bitterness

On November 30, 2007, I was told of an intriguing article in the local newspaper. I drove to a local store to buy a copy and saw that the article was positioned “above the fold”, that is, at the top of the front page, the space reserved for the most important news of the day. By that, the editor of the newspaper was signaling to his readers that in his judgment, this story was more important for them than any national or international news that day. The article said that a local minister had for years been breaking up marriages, that he had telephoned an innocent woman, out of the blue, to tell her she was evil, and that he was teaching that the only way people could be saved from eternal damnation is if they lived in North Carolina. Significantly, the two principal sources of the information were Christian ministers—reliable sources, certainly. And one of them was even a relative of the heretic minister; so, he surely knew the truth about him. About a week later, another article appeared in the same newspaper, this one penned by another Christian minister, accusing the heretic of teaching that God had no people on earth except the few who participated in the home fellowship he pastored. It was all quite shocking. Why would anyone listen to such a nut?

The most surprising element of the articles, though, was that I personally knew the minister about whom they had been written—it was me! None of the accusations were true, but I learned soon enough that the truth is irrelevant in such situations, for once slander is made public, the slanderer’s purpose has been achieved, which is to kill the influence of the one being talked about. As Winston Churchill noted, “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

After the news articles came out, I was cut off by businessmen and others with whom I had enjoyed good relations for years. Some contractors refused to come again to do work on my property. Young people in my congregation were ashamed to show up at school, fearing that their schoolmates had learned of the newspaper stories. Others, young men as

well as women, were unceremoniously dumped when those they were dating found out about the articles, and some were ostracized by their peers as belonging to a cult. Anyone associated with me was liable to be in some way abused.

The public humiliation was, to that time, the most hurtful event of my life, but Jesus used it to teach me precious lessons, and I sincerely thank him for it. One truth he taught me was that if we get the gold out of a trial, even a very hard one, we will end up thankful for that trial and will pray for those whom God used to put us through it. My wise Uncle Joe's testimony from long ago became very real to me. He said, "I will tell you who your friends are. Your friends are whoever God uses to get you closer to Him." I felt that truth now, deep in my soul. In fact, so much more like Jesus did the experience make me that I told my congregation that God is the One who put those articles about me in the newspaper, and it thrilled me to realize, after some time, that in my heart was no bitterness toward anyone, neither the editor nor the people whose lies he had published. I genuinely felt toward them the way Joseph felt toward his brothers who had cruelly sold him into slavery years before: "Yes, you meant to do evil to me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). Joseph was able to make that statement only because he had gotten the gold out of the trial God had put him through.

Rejoice (as Soon as You Can)

Another lesson I learned is that Jesus never exaggerated; he meant exactly what he said. His words now carried more weight with me than ever, for I had experienced the truth Jesus spoke when he told his followers, "Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you, and say every evil thing against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be glad! Your reward is great in heaven, for that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt. 5:11–12). After I got the gold from my trial, I felt blessed by what I had suffered! Half seriously, I suggested to my congregation that I wish God would let us edit Jesus' exhortation to say, "Rejoice, and be glad, *as soon as you can*." Likewise with James' exhortation: "Count it all joy *as soon as you can*, my brothers, when you fall into various trials" (Jas. 1:2). It took me a while to get there, to feel that way from the heart, but the important thing is, I did. We all did. Neither I nor my congregation would now take anything for that painful experience. It hurt, yes, but then, so does any surgery, and the Great Physician had been working on us for our good.

Paul was speaking from experience when he wrote, “We boast in tribulations, seeing that tribulation produces patience, and patience, character, and character, hope. And hope does not make ashamed, for the love of God is poured out within our hearts by the holy Spirit which is given to us” (Rom. 5:3–5). If we get the point of the trials our heavenly Father determines for us, we are improved by the experience, for the love of God is poured into our hearts for everyone, and that love prevents bitterness from taking root in our souls.

Bias

Few servants of God since Paul have been hated and maligned as much as Montanus has been. Churchmen and earthly rulers conspired for centuries to shield society from the influence of Montanus, and their efforts were remarkably effective, for not a scrap of the “infinite number of books”⁴ that Montanus and his fellows produced have survived. Consequently, any conclusion reached about Montanus, including that of this author, can only be a reflection of one’s bias.

As for my bias, I believe that Montanus and his fellows were of God because (1) the writings of the apostles show that the first-century body of Christ, en masse, forsook the truth⁵ and (2) the writings of second-century Christians show that the first-century apostasy worsened in the following century. Tragically, that downward process continued, culminating in the Synthesis of Rome and Christians in the fourth century. At first, it seems odd that Christian writers from the second century onward appear to be oblivious to the massive first-century apostasy, but that becomes understandable once one realizes that they did not acknowledge that great apostasy because they were part of it.

Even if I am wrong about Montanus himself, and he was not sent by God to cry out against the inchoate Christian Movement, someone should have done so, for it was demonstrably false. So, why not Montanus? Nothing that is surely known about him disqualifies him from being a true messenger of God, and at that time in history, God’s children desperately needed one. And everything that is certainly known about Montanus indicates that he was such a messenger.

⁴ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII.xii, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 5, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 123.

⁵ This is demonstrated in Part Five of Book 2 in this Iron Kingdom Series, *The Jerusalem Council*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

A Unique Kind of Sting

The few surviving statements attributed to Montanus, recorded for posterity by his adversaries, suggest the heart of a true man of God, and I am not alone in that opinion. Here is an excerpt from the journal of John Wesley:

Wed. 15. By reflecting on an odd book which I had read in this journey, *The General Delusion of Christians with regard to Prophecy*, I was fully convinced of what I have long suspected: (1) That *those like Montanus*^d, in the second and third centuries, were real, scriptural *believers*^e, and (2) That the grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn, was not only that faith and holiness were well nigh lost, but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves and to decry them all as either madness or imposture.⁶

Wesley's personal experience of being persecuted and slandered by fellow Christians for his devotion to Christ no doubt shaped his thinking concerning Montanus. He considered sincere believers like himself and Montanus to be true Christians because it never dawned on him that Christianity began with the Roman emperor Constantine in AD 325, not with Christ. In spite of harboring that wrong idea, sincere servants of God like Wesley will always feel the unique kind of sting that comes when believers reject the Spirit of truth. It is unforgettable, and in the hatred so often expressed against Montanus, Wesley felt that feeling. Christian ministers have always been especially passionate in their reaction against the truth, for they sense in the preaching of true ministers of God a threat to their status. They feel no kindred spirit when God's true servants speak; most often, they feel attacked.

Honorable Christians

John Wesley also made an observation concerning Montanus which he could not have made had he not first suffered similar abuses from "honorable Christians":

God always reserved a seed for himself; a few that worshipped him in spirit and in truth. I have often doubted, whether these were not the very persons whom the rich and honorable Christians,

⁶ John Wesley, "Wesley's Journal: August 15, 1750" in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley A.M. in Seven Volumes. Vol. III*, ed. John Emory, First American Complete and Standard Edition (New York, NY: Published by B. Waugh and T. Mason, J. Collord, Printer, 1835), 496.

who will always have number as well as power on their side, did not stigmatize from time to time with the title of heretics. Perhaps it was chiefly by this artifice of the Devil and his children that the good which was in them being evil spoken of, they were prevented from being so extensively useful as otherwise they might have been. Nay, I have doubted whether that arch-heretic, Montanus, was not one of the holiest men in the second century.⁷

The fact that Montanus was so hated and slandered by Christian ministers in his day commends him to those like John Wesley, who follow hard after Christ and suffer abuse because of it at the hands of “honorable Christians”. Sincere children of God feel a kinship with any abused, righteous soul. That is what I sensed in Montanus almost fifty years ago as a seminary student when I learned about him, and that is what led me to write this book.

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Remember

- “I will tell you who your friends are. Your friends are whoever God uses to get you closer to Him.”
- Jesus never exaggerated; he meant exactly what he said.
- If we get the point of the trials our heavenly Father determines for us, we are improved by the experience.
- The love of God prevents bitterness from taking root in our souls.
- Any conclusion reached about Montanus can only be a reflection of one’s bias.
- Nothing that is surely known about Montanus disqualifies him from being a true messenger of God.
- The heart of a servant of God feels a unique kind of sting when Christians react indignantly to the truth.
- Christian ministers are especially passionate in their reaction against the truth, for they sense in the preaching of true ministers of God a threat to their status.
- True servants of God feel a kinship with any abused, righteous soul.

⁷ John Wesley, “The Wisdom of God’s Counsel’s”, Sermon 68 no. 9, *The Sermons of John Wesley (1872 Edition)*—Thomas Jackson’s Numbering, Wesley Center Online <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-thomas-jacksons-numbering/>.

Chapter Two

What Is Known about Montanus

What Montanus and Others Did

The many articles and books that Christians have written about Montanus belie the fact that almost nothing is actually known about the man. No one knows where or when he was born, whether he was rich or poor, educated or unlearned, or even if he was slave or free, for when the emperor Constantine established the Roman Universal Church, its leaders destroyed whatever they could of Montanus. The scant information we have comes only from them, but their visceral, pathological hatred of Montanus makes much of their information suspect, to say the least. From their writings, however, the following facts seem certain:

1. Montanus began his ministry during the mid-second century.
2. He ministered in Phrygia, a territory within the Roman province of Asia, where “all” believers had rejected Paul and his gospel before he died (2Tim. 1:15).
3. He repudiated and condemned the entire developing Christian Movement.
4. He labored for Christ with others, including two women, Maximilla and Prisca (Priscilla).
5. He did not introduce any theological novelties.
6. He and those with him spoke in tongues.
7. He supported other Spirit-filled ministers so that they could travel and preach the gospel.
8. He and Maximilla established storehouses, possibly to care for the poor.
9. Montanus and those with him wrote many pamphlets and/or books.

None of the historical evidence reveals exactly what Montanus taught or how he lived, but if he had taught a blatantly false gospel or had lived a debauched life, Christian leaders would have convincingly proclaimed from the housetops their proof of it. It must have been frustrating to them

that they could not. Montanus' message, instead of new and strange, seems only to have been a call for believers to return to the old truths of Christ and the apostles, echoing the ancient call of God to His people through Jeremiah: "Stand in the ways and look, and ask for the old paths, where this, the good way is, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls!" (Jer. 6:16a).

What Montanus and Others Said

Only a few sayings that are believably attributed to Montanus and his two best-known associates, Maximilla and Prisca, have survived. These are the sayings attributed to Montanus:⁸

- "I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man." (*The Panarion*, 48.11.1)
- "I am neither an angel nor an emissary; I, the Lord God, the Father, have come." (*The Panarion*, 48.4.1; 11.1; 11.9)
- "Behold, man is like a lyre, and I flit about like a pick. Man sleeps, and I awaken him. Behold, the Lord is he who transforms the heart of men and gives men a heart." (*The Panarion*, 48.4.1)
- "Why do you say the greater man is saved? For the just man will shine a hundred times brighter than the sun, and the little ones among you who are saved will shine a hundred times brighter than the moon." (*The Panarion*, 48.10.3)

These sayings are attributed to Maximilla:

- "I am chased like a wolf from the sheep; I am no wolf. I am word, and spirit, and power!" ("The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus", IV, 7:336)
- "Hearken not unto me, but hearken unto Christ!" (*The Panarion*, 48.12.4)
- "After me, there will no longer be a prophet, but the end." (*The Panarion*, 48.12.2)

There are also a few prophetic sayings which Tertullian attributed to Montanus and others with him, such as this, from Prisca:

- "The holy minister knows how to minister sanctity. For purity is harmonious; and they [i.e., the pure] see visions; and turning their face downwards, they even hear manifest voices, as salutary as they are withal secret." (*Exhortation to Chastity*, 10)

⁸ For this list, I relied principally on Ronald E. Heine's book, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 3–5.

Other quotes will be discussed later.

Two things in particular stand out about these eight sayings. First, only one of them is prophetic in the sense of foretelling; the others are forthtelling, that is, divinely inspired utterances concerning a situation. Secondly, there is nothing doctrinally controversial in any of them. Even Hippolytus, a vehement critic of Montanus, credited Montanus as being doctrinally sound in several essential areas.⁹ So did Epiphanius, another fierce critic. He admitted that the Phrygian saints were not doctrinal heretics, that they “accept every scripture of the Old and the New Testaments and likewise affirm the resurrection of the dead,”¹⁰ and that “they agree with the holy catholic church about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ And while Epiphanius could not deny that the Phrygian saints were knowledgeable in the Scriptures and used them often, it was his opinion that they used the Scriptures only “to make a false case [by combining] falsehood with truth.”¹² Consequently, he condemned them as “false prophets”¹³ and “deceivers”¹⁴ who taught “doctrines of devils”.¹⁵

In Eusebius’ *Church History*, published in the fourth century, another unnamed critic called “the Anonymous” gave the following description of something that happened, assumedly often, in meetings of the Phrygian saints. He said, “The Spirit pronounced them blessed as they rejoiced and gloried in him.”¹⁶ That comment is believable, and it is a wonderful thing. Would to God that was being experienced by believers everywhere today. But the Anonymous was not favorably impressed. He went on to assure

⁹ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII.xii.

¹⁰ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.1.3–4, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd rev. ed, Vol. 2, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. De Fide* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2013) 6–7. Though Hippolytus agreed, neither man offered any evidence from Montanus in support of these complimentary statements.

¹¹ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.1.3–4. This cannot be true, for the Roman Church’s doctrine of the Holy Trinity did not exist in Montanus’ time. Epiphanius is referring to statements by Tertullian (cf. *Against Praxeas*, 1.1–3, 5) which Epiphanius interpreted as Trinitarian.

¹² *Ibid.*, 48.4.4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 48.3.2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.11.5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.1.4.

¹⁶ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.9, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 1, *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), 231.

his readers that it was the Devil, not God, who was pronouncing them blessed and that the Devil did so only to “puff them up by the magnitude of his promises.”¹⁷ The phrase “magnitude of his promises” makes one wonder what promises God was making to those believers.) Revealingly, the Anonymous also said that the Spirit which spoke through the Phrygian saints would sometimes admonish the Phrygians themselves, “openly, in a wise and faithful manner.”¹⁸ That information should have commended their faith to the Anonymous and other Christian critics; instead, the Anonymous declared that an evil spirit had deceived them by pretending to be an impartial and righteous judge of men.¹⁹ There was simply nothing the Spirit could say or do through the Phrygian saints to convince Christians like the Anonymous that God was the One speaking through them; the Christians’ consuming hatred of Montanus utterly blinded them.

In his time on earth, Jesus suffered the same blind hatred, and he described those who were so blinded (Mt. 11:16–19):

To what, now, shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in marketplaces and calling out to their playmates, and saying, “We piped for you, but you didn’t dance! We sang a dirge for you, but you didn’t mourn.” For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they are saying, “He has a demon.” And the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Behold! A gluttonous man and a drunkard! A friend of tax collectors and sinners!”

When someone hates the truth, nothing the righteous do will persuade him of it. As with Montanus and many of God’s other servants through history, there was nothing Jesus could say or do to convince his adversaries in Israel that God was speaking through him; their consuming hatred of Jesus paralyzed their ability to reason. You can never satisfy an evil spirit because, as God said, “There is no peace to the wicked” (Isa. 48:22).

By recording the Anonymous’ account of the Spirit speaking through the Phrygian saints and at times admonishing those through whom it spoke, Eusebius preserved for us a precious glimpse into the faith of Montanus and his fellows. That information makes it clear to this author that the One who spoke through the Phrygians was truly the righteous and impartial Judge of hearts, encouraging or correcting the Phrygians themselves as needed. And the Anonymous’ hate-filled characterization

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

of that information exemplifies the hardness of heart found through the centuries in Christians toward Montanus. In this case, the Anonymous condemned believers who were being blessed and corrected by the Lord for no other reason than that the Lord did it.

Montanus' Judgment of Second-Century Christians

If first-century believers fell away from Paul's gospel, which they did, and if second-century believers continued down that path, which is equally as certain, then what Montanus and those with him said of believers in his time was true. It is altogether believable that Jesus would cry out to second-century believers, "I am chased like a wolf from the sheep; I am no wolf. I am word, and spirit, and power!" The ceremonial religion which apostate believers of that time were developing, described in detail in the previous two books of this Series, was indeed driving away the Spirit as if it were a dangerous wolf. All ceremonies are, to use a Pauline phrase, "in the flesh", and it is the nature of the flesh to distrust and to persecute those who are "in the Spirit" (Gal. 4:29; cf. 5:17). The Spirit and the flesh never share the same moment in a person's life; they are mutually exclusive spiritual conditions.

The surprise is not that God would send a messenger to call upon his wayward children to repent; the surprise is that the call was recorded for posterity *by the guilty party*. It is astonishing that Christian writers would publish for all the world to see the very words from God which condemned them—words which will stand as a testimony against them in the Final Judgment.

According to Asterius Urbanus, a third-century critic of Montanus, an "arrogant spirit taught [the Phrygians] to revile the entire *body of Christ*^b under heaven."²⁰ It is more likely that the saints in Phrygia condemned the ritualistic direction that many in the body of Christ had taken, which is what anyone who understood Paul's gospel would have done. Asterius claimed that the Phrygians reviled his religion "because the spirit of false prophecy [which spoke through them] received neither honor from it nor entrance into it,"²¹ but the evidence that exists suggests to me that Montanus had a very different, and godly, motive. Asterius' goal was to portray Montanus as envious and disgruntled because Christians did not accept him, but his surviving statements do not have that feel about them;

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

on the contrary, they sound like a man who wants nothing to do with the Christian Movement, a man sent from God to warn believers against it.

In the gospels, when some of the Jews sought to justify their hatred of Jesus by saying, “Our father is Abraham”, Jesus answered, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.” And when they replied that God was their Father, Jesus answered, “If God was your Father, you would love me, for I came from God” (Jn. 8:39, 41b–42). But they would not hear him and wanted to kill him. Montanus experienced the same sort of hatred in the second century. For those who had claimed the title “Christian” for themselves, the mere claim to be serving God was replacing genuine service to Him. Ancient Israel’s sin of hypocrisy had gained the upper hand among believers: “This people draw near *to me* with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Isa. 29:13). And they hated those like Montanus who refused to go along with their hypocrisy.

Christians who refused the truth Montanus preached were among those Tertullian described as being used by the Devil “to destroy the truth by defending it”—that is, defending what they thought the truth was. Jesus was referring to such men when he warned his disciples that “they will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (Jn. 16:2). And though such men claim to know God and to be defending the truth, they persecute those whom God sends, Jesus said, “because they have not known either the Father or me” (Jn. 16:3).

Jesus told some of the unrighteous in Israel that he was going to send them “prophets and wise men and scribes” but that they would persecute and even kill them (Mt. 23:34). Having suffered the malicious hatred of Christian leaders, the Phrygian saints rightly called them murderers. Asterius claimed that “they call us slayers of the prophets because we did not receive their loquacious prophets, who, they say, are those that the Lord promised to send to the people.”²² But it was not true, as Asterius must have known, that the reason Phrygians called Christians murderers was because Christians would not heed their prophets. It is much more likely that they considered Christians murderers because the Phrygians knew that the Christian Movement was Satan’s idea, who was “a murderer from the beginning” (Jn. 8:44). And in the centuries following the Synthesis, Christian leaders abundantly proved the Phrygians to have been right.

²² Ibid., V.xvi.12.

A Haunting Cry

German theologian Walter Bauer (1877–1960) made the perceptive observation that we may judge how popular the message of Montanus and his fellows was by the scale of Christian leaders’ enormous response to it.²³ After the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, no record exists of a council of believers being held for over a hundred years, but Montanus’ preaching stirred up Christians to convene several councils, “the first councils, or synods, known to history” apart from the Jerusalem Council.²⁴ There were, of course, a number of doctrinal conflicts among believers of that time, but none were so great that councils had been called to deal with them. Montanus, however, presented a powerful argument against the developing Christian Movement, and it provoked Christian leaders to devise a coordinated attack on him. The first of these councils was convened in AD 175, and over the next twenty-five years, according to Montanus’ enemies, a series of councils were convened to condemn Montanus and those like him.²⁵

So powerfully and effectively did Montanus denounce the Christian religion that their hatred and fear of him did not die when he did. His memory was no more silent than he was while he lived, and it has haunted Christians for two thousand years. They have cursed it, labeled it, ridiculed it, ignored it, and fled before it, but they have never been able to escape its relentless cry. Whatever God does is forever (cf. Eccl. 3:14), and Montanus’ second-century cry has continued to reverberate through the millennia because it was from God. In the fourth century, the Faith taught by Montanus was still flourishing in parts of the empire, and it still provoked fierce Christian responses. Eusebius, Constantine’s most vocal advocate,

devoted four chapters in the fifth book of his *Church History* to the *faith of Montanus*^e and made other scattered references. Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398), after saying that many heresies would not be referred to because they were then academic relics, went out of

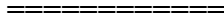
²³ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, eds. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, 2nd German ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 141–142.

²⁴ J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995), 135. Cf. Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.10, eds. Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 118.

²⁵ Leo D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 22.

his way to treat of *the faith of Montanus*^e in several chapters because the dangers were real and the faithful needed to be warned.²⁶

Mountains of dirt have been heaped upon the memory of Montanus, yet Christians have never been able to silence his cry. The Christian conscience is still troubled by him, for the echo of Montanus' powerful voice not only dogged the Christians of his day, but it has continued to dog them for almost two millennia, and it will dog them until the end of the age.



Remember

- Montanus' message, instead of new and strange, seems only to have been a call for believers to return to the old truths of Christ and the apostles.
- When someone hates the truth, nothing the righteous do will persuade him of it.
- You can never satisfy an evil spirit.
- The ceremonial religion which apostate believers developed drove away the Spirit as if it were a dangerous wolf.
- All ceremonies are "in the flesh", and it is the nature of the flesh to distrust and to persecute those who are "in the Spirit".
- The Spirit and the flesh never share the same moment in a person's life; they are mutually exclusive spiritual conditions.
- We may judge how popular the message of Montanus was by the scale of Christian leaders' enormous response to it.
- Whatever God does is forever.
- Montanus' powerful voice not only dogged the Christians of his day, but it has continued to dog them for almost two millennia, and it will dog them until the end of the age.

²⁶ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 170.

Chapter Three

Early Accusations

Labels

Since nothing is left of the writings of Montanus or those with him, we cannot know what, if anything, they called themselves. It appears that they described themselves as “spiritual people”, as opposed to Christians, whom they called “carnal people”.²⁷ It is also suggested by the Anonymous and Serapion, another Montanus critic,²⁸ that they called their experience “the new prophecy”, but there is no solid evidence for them doing that. It may well be that the Spirit-filled saints in Phrygia did not call themselves anything but saw themselves merely as living and worshipping in spirit and in truth, as Jesus said believers must do (Jn. 4:24). For all we know, they believed that simply belonging to God and Christ was good enough, without any label.

But to marginalize them, leaders of the Christian Movement resorted to the time-tested method of name-calling. The first recorded use of the label “Montanist” was by Cyril of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century.²⁹ Modern scholars almost always follow Cyril’s lead, imagining that the believers with Montanus were following Montanus instead of Jesus and referring to the events in Phrygia as “Montanism” or “the Montanus Movement”, as if the Spirit crying out through servants of God against apostasy is an abnormality that requires a label.

Early Christian leaders also labeled the move of the Spirit in Phrygia as “Phrygianism” or “Cataphrygianism”; and those who were part of it, “Pepuziani”, after Pepuza, said to be Montanus’ hometown,³⁰ or

²⁷ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi, 230n2.

²⁸ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.4 and V.xix.2, respectively.

²⁹ Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, in reference to Cyril’s Catechetical Lecture, XVI.8 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

³⁰ E.g., “Prædestinatus or Prædestinatorum Haeresis, I.27”, The Tertullian Project, Roger Pearce, last modified December 11, 1999, <https://www.tertullian.org/tertullianistae/prædestinatus.htm>.

“Tascodrugians”, for reasons that are debated; and others. Interestingly, one early opponent of the Faith called it “the heresy that bears the name Miltiades”³¹ instead of “the heresy that bears the name Montanus”, but in time, “Montanism” became the preferred label, not “Miltiadism”, perhaps because it had a catchier ring to it. A modern equivalent would be “personality cult” or some such. Christians have in the past labeled those in my area who believe the truth “Clarkites” because I happen to be the one teaching it here. If a man named Smith taught it, Christians would label them “Smithites” and dismiss them instead of honestly considering what the man said. That is what happened in the early 1800s to a minister named Edward Irving. After he was filled with the Spirit and saw the evil of both the Roman and Protestant churches, Christians labeled those who believed his message “Irvingites” and spoke of “Irving and his movement”.³²

Such labels, and there were many of them, were concocted by early Christians in order to leave the impression that (1) Montanus had formed an aberrant sect, and (2) those with Montanus were united by admiration of him, not by a common devotion to Christ. I have chosen not to use those pejorative terms. When they are included in comments by historians, they will, as the case warrants, be replaced with the appropriate terms and designated as described in the Author’s Notes at the beginning of this work.

There never was a “Montanus Movement” or a religious system of “Montanism”. What was new and abnormal was the Apostates’ “Christian Movement”. There is no credible evidence that what the Spirit was doing in Montanus, Maximilla, Prisca, and other Phrygian believers was new. What scholars call “the Montanist Movement” was only a continuation, or perhaps a revival, of the Faith of Christ. That Christians condemned Montanus and the others in Phrygia was a testimony against themselves and their religion, not Montanus. It indicates how far from the light of Christ those who called themselves Christians had drifted by the mid-second century.

³¹ Asterius Urbanus, “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, I, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 7. In *Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, 2 Clement, Early Liturgies, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885–96), 335.

³² Sullivan, C., “*The Irvingites and the Gift of Tongues*”, Charles A. Sullivan (blog), updated October 17, 2020, <https://charlesasullivan.com/1826/the-irvingites-and-the-gift-of-tongues/>.

The AD 550 Event: Mass Suicide or Mass Murder?

Procopius (c. 500–c. 570), a historian of some note, wrote an unflattering book about the emperor Justinian, which he kept secret until after the emperor’s death, fearing exile or execution if he published it before then. In that book, *The Secret History*, if Procopius disliked a person about whom he was writing, he was not averse to repeating as fact the most absurd slanders against him. For example, nobody repeats as legitimate history Procopius’ assertion—on authority of men “whose souls were pure”—that Justinian’s head sometimes vanished and the rest of his body temporarily became amorphous.³³ That is nonsense, of course; and yet, in the same work, Procopius claimed that in about 550, believers like Montanus committed mass suicide by shutting themselves inside churches and setting the buildings on fire.³⁴ (The much more likely scenario is that Christians drove them into a building, set it on fire, and then spread the rumor that the poor victims did it to themselves.) We do not know if Procopius invented that story or if it was just a popular Christian myth that he repeated; he was, however, the first to write about it, as far as we know. In any case, the tale has been mindlessly repeated by anti-Montanus historians ever since.

One such historian, the classicist E. R. Dodds (1893–1979), explained that they “burned themselves to death rather than fall into the hands of their fellow Christians [led by John, bishop of Ephesus],” adding that “the eventual defeat of Montanism was inevitable” and that these were “the last Montanists”.³⁵ Robert Grant agreed, saying that “John, bishop of Ephesus, struck a fatal blow at the movement.”³⁶ Fortunately, in God’s kingdom, the standard is not that “by the word of two or more *experts* shall every matter be established” (cf. Dt. 17:6; Jn. 8:17). The essential problem with the conclusion reached by Dodds and Grant is that neither “Montanists” nor a “Montanist Movement” ever existed, and so, it is impossible that a fatal blow could have been given to them. Religions of man can be destroyed, but the work of God is eternal.

³³ Procopius, *Procopius: The Anecdota or Secret History*, XII.20–22, trans. H. B. Dewing, Vol. 6, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935. Reprinted 1998), 290.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XI.23.

³⁵ E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. First published 1965), 67.

³⁶ R. M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Emergence of Christianity in the Roman World* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996), 141.

Experiences with Jesus and testimonies like that of Montanus were known before Montanus, and such experiences and testimonies have continued since that time. Nothing can stop God from answering the prayers of His children and pouring out His Spirit upon them. We know that later, people like Montanus were still around, in spite of what Dodds and Grant said, because Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) spoke of them.³⁷ And we are told that in 722, Pope Leo III made a decree that all “Montanists” and Jews were to be forcibly baptized into the Roman Church.³⁸ But if the last of them had been burned up by John of Ephesus in about 550, how could they have been around in 722 to be baptized, forcibly or otherwise?

The AD 550 Event according to the Zuqnin Chronicle (c. 775)

The uber-Christian emperor Justinian (482–565) demanded that anything Montanus related be destroyed,³⁹ and to that end, the devout bishop John of Ephesus travelled to Pepuza in Phrygia. In the Church history which the bishop subsequently wrote, he told of his destructive work there, the only contemporary account of it. His original document is lost, but in about 775, the unknown author of a document known as the Zuqnin Chronicle copied copiously and word for word from John’s history:

At this time [about 550], the corrupting heresy of Montanus—the story of which and how it emerged was written down for us at the time of the Apostles—was ridiculed and uprooted. For through the exhortation of holy John, Bishop of Asia, the bones of Montanus—he who said about himself that he was the Spirit Paraclete—Cratius (his associate),⁴⁰ Maximilla and Priscilla, his prophetesses, were found. He set them on fire and razed their temples to their foundations.⁴¹

³⁷ Gregory the Great, “Register of Epistles”, XI.lxvii, *Leo the Great, Gregory the Great*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 12, *A Select Library of the Christian and Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1895), 12.

³⁸ Kaegi, Walter Emil, “Leo III”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, date accessed February 1, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leo-III>.

³⁹ Will Durant, “Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from their Beginnings to A D 325”, Vol. 3, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944. Renewed 1972), 605.

⁴⁰ An addition based upon the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*.

⁴¹ Roger Pearse, “Montanus in the Chronicle of Zuqnin”, *Thoughts on Antiquity, Patristics, Information Access and More* (blog), June 7, 2011, <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2011/06/07/montanus-in-the-chronicle-of-zuqnin/>.

The fact that John of Ephesus said that Montanus' story had been written down at the time of the apostles should signal to every reader that his history is bogus, for the apostles lived a hundred years before Montanus.

*The AD 550 Event according to the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian
(1126–1199)*

Michael the Syrian, a patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, wrote a history of the world. His account of events associated with Montanus relied on more sources than did the Chronicle of Zuqnin; still, as the distinguished professor William Tabbernee says, Michael's account "illustrates dramatically the major issue confronting historians of *the Phrygian phenomenon*^e, namely the paucity of sources."⁴² That is true, but it also dramatically illustrates how much the Christian hatred of Montanus and the art of Christian mythmaking were thriving in the twelfth century. Michael wrote the following:

In the country of Phrygia, there is a place called Pepuza where the *Spirit-filled Phrygians*^d had a bishop and clergy; they called it Jerusalem, and there they killed the Christians. John of Asia went and burned their synagogue, on the orders of the emperor. In this house there was found a large marble shrine, sealed with lead and bound with iron fittings. On the top was written: "Montanus and his wives." We opened it and found Montanus and his two wives, Maximilla and Priscilla, who had gold leaf on their mouths. [The Phrygian believers] were ashamed of seeing the fetid bones which they called "the Spirit". They were told: "Aren't you ashamed to be seduced by this shameless wretch, and to call him 'the Spirit'?" [For Jesus said,] 'A spirit hath not flesh or bones.' And the bones were burned. The *Spirit-filled Phrygians*^d were heard wailing and crying. "Now," they said, "the world is ruined and will perish!" Their disgraceful books were also found and burned. The house was cleansed and became a church.

Previously, in the time of Justinian I, some people had informed the emperor that Montanus, at the time of his death, had ordered those who buried him to place him fifty cubits [seventy-five feet] underground "because," he said, "fire shall discover me, and devour the whole face of the earth." His supporters, by the

⁴² William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism*, North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series 16 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 1.

pernicious work of demons, falsely spread the rumor that his bones could cast out demons; they had bribed a few individuals who, for the bread in their mouths, claimed that he had healed them.⁴³

Then, Michael expanded upon a Christian myth which John of Ephesus only touched upon, and which anyone casually familiar with Scripture knows is impossible. For he not only said that Montanus lived at the time of the apostles, as John of Ephesus had claimed, but he also said that Montanus was the son of Simon the Magician, the wicked sorcerer mentioned in Acts 8, and that Apollos put a curse on him!

Apollos, the companion of Paul, wrote that Montanus was the son of Simon Magus and that when his father [Simon Magus] died by the prayer of Peter, he fled from Rome and began to disturb the world. Then Apollos (led) by the Spirit, went to where he was and saw him sitting and preaching the error. He began to curse him, saying: ‘O enemy of God, may the Lord punish you!’ Montanus began to rebuke him, and said: “What is there between you and me, Apollos? If you prophesy, I do too; if you are an apostle, so am I; if you are a physician, so am I.” Apollos said, ‘Let your mouth be closed, in the name of the Lord!’ He immediately fell silent and could never speak again. The people believed in our Lord and were baptized. They overthrew the seat of Montanus who fled and escaped.”⁴⁴

Gruesome Deaths, of Course

Leaders of the early Christian Movement regularly invented stories of gruesome deaths for those whom they considered heretics, and so, it is only to be expected that a story about the miserable deaths of Montanus and his fellows would be circulated. According to Asterius, a Spirit-filled Phrygian named Theodotus sometimes “fell into spurious ecstasies” and delivered prophecies “as if he were sometime taken up and received into the heavens.” But alas, in the end, according to Asterius, Theodotus “gave himself wholly over to the spirit of delusion and was tossed by him into the air, and met his end miserably.”⁴⁵ In other words, poor Theodotus died when a demon spirit threw him up so high that when he returned to earth

⁴³ Roger Pearse, “Montanus in the Chronicle of Zuqnin”, *Thoughts on Antiquity, Patristics, Information Access and More* (blog), June 7, 2011, <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2011/06/07/montanus-in-the-chronicle-of-zuqnin/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, III, VII, ANF, 7:336.

and crash-landed. As for Montanus and Maximilla, Asterius asserts that they got so frenzied in the Spirit that they “both hung themselves. . . . And thus they died, and ended their lives like the traitor Judas.”⁴⁶

Asterius assured his readers that he had only the purest of motives in providing this unsavory information for them and that, in Christian love for their souls, he was only warning them of the awful fate that awaits anyone who would dare to be like Montanus and not join the Christian Movement. But then, like someone trying to avoid a lawsuit, Asterius hypocritically adds, “They say these things happened in this manner. But as we did not see them, O friend, we do not pretend to know.”⁴⁷ But pretending to know is exactly what Asterius was doing when he published as fact such baseless gossip about the Spirit-filled saints in Phrygia.

Another notable myth of a gruesome death, possibly inspired by the death of Jehoram in 2Chronicles 21:15–19, concerns Arius in the fourth century, who taught the truth about the Father and the Son but was condemned by Trinitarians with Constantine’s backing: “It was then Saturday, and Arius was expecting to assemble with the church on the day following: but divine retribution overtook his daring criminalities. For going out of the imperial palace, . . . he paraded proudly through the midst of the city, attracting the notice of all the people. As he approached the place called Constantine’s Forum, where the column of porphyry is erected, a terror arising from the remorse of conscience seized Arius, with the terror of a violent relaxation of the bowels. He therefore enquired whether there was a convenient place near, and being directed to the back of Constantine’s Forum, he hastened thither. Soon after, a faintness came over him, and together with the evacuations, his bowels protruded, followed by a copious hemorrhage, and the descent of the smaller intestines. Moreover, portions of his spleen and liver were brought off in the effusion of blood, so that he almost immediately died.”⁴⁸

How Montanus Might Have Answered His Critics

For his massive work, *Church History*, Eusebius relied upon Christian writers of previous centuries for information about Montanus. If anything remained in Eusebius’ day of the books which Montanus and his fellows

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, V.xvi.12.

⁴⁸ Socrates, “Socrates Scholasticus”, *Church History*, 1.38, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 2, *A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), 34–35.

wrote, Eusebius ignored them. Being himself antagonistic toward the Faith, Eusebius uncritically repeated as fact only the slanders of earlier Christians. Yet, Christian scholars and historians have relied on his information through the centuries. Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was right when he said, “Eusebius, though all historians have followed him, has been proven guilty of so many distortions, dissimulations, and inventions that he has forfeited all claim to figure as a decisive source.”⁴⁹ Among the many despicable characters in Church history, Eusebius ranks as one of the worst. But as concerns Montanus, the criticisms which Eusebius recorded for posterity provide valuable insights as to the mindset of Christians of the time.

As has been noted, one of Eusebius’ chief sources of information about Montanus was an unsavory character called “the Anonymous”. But the Anonymous did not know Montanus any more than Eusebius did; he was only quoting earlier anti-Montanus writers such as Asterius, Apollonius, and Hippolytus,⁵⁰ while mixing in his own spice to the stories. The Anonymous, writing late in the second century,⁵¹ sarcastically wrote that Maximilla “prophesied of wars and anarchy,” saying, “It is today more than thirteen years since she died, and there has been neither a partial nor general war in the world, but continued peace, even to the Christians.”⁵² But the Anonymous didn’t wait long enough. Maximilla’s prophecy was about to come true, for the empire was approaching the catastrophic third century, in which the empire’s economy collapsed, its infrastructure fell into disrepair, civil administration failed, and civil conflicts and assassinations became commonplace. In the seventy-three years from Caracalla in 211 to Diocletian in 284, dozens of men laid claim to the throne, and dozens were assassinated. Moreover, during those same years, there were several state-sponsored persecutions of believers. Diocletian finally stabilized the empire, but then he initiated the empire-wide “Great Persecution”⁵³ of believers, which the Anonymous did not live to see. But Jesus knew it was coming, and he forewarned believers of

⁴⁹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 239.

⁵⁰ In addition to Eusebius’ *Church History*, sources for Asterius, Apollonius, and Hippolytus are, respectively, “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, ANF, 7:335–337; Apollonius, “Remains of the Second and Third Centuries”, ANF, 8:775–776; and Hippolytus, “The Refutation of All Heresies”, ANF, 5:9–153.

⁵¹ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi, 233n32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, V.xvi.18–19.

⁵³ Cf. Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300–1000*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 12.

it through Maximilla. Eusebius, writing afterwards, knew it had happened, but he published the Anonymous' sarcastic remarks anyway.

To respond to the multitude of accusations against Montanus, it seemed good to me to yield the platform to Montanus himself so that after two millennia, he may have an opportunity to reply. Had Christians allowed Montanus' writings to survive, we would have a clearer picture of how he responded to accusations, if he did at all. As it is, we can only imagine what his answers would have been.

By the time the following critics recorded their opinions and accusations against Montanus, he had been dead for some time. None of them personally knew the man. If Montanus was a true man of God, which I believe he was, and if he understood Paul's gospel, which I believe he did, then Montanus' replies to his accusers would have been something like the following.

Accusations from Serapion (about AD 200)

Serapion was bishop of Antioch at the turn of the third century and a highly regarded theologian among Christians. He appears to have been a prolific writer, but only fragments of his writings survive.

According to Serapion:

The believers in Phrygia were a "lying band of the so-called, 'new prophecy.'"⁵⁴

Montanus' response:

"We do not lie, and if some among us call our blessing a 'new prophecy', it is only because foolish believers like you have made true prophecy an old thing."

According to Serapion:

The believers in Phrygia were "an abomination to all the brotherhood throughout the world."⁵⁵

Montanus' response:

"The abomination is brotherhood in an apostate religion, though it be throughout the world. There is no safety in numbers from God's judgment, Serapion. Solomon said the wicked will be punished even if their numbers are great (Prov. 11:21), and Jesus said that only a few would find the right way (Mt. 7:14). Those who belong to your brotherhood are

⁵⁴ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, V.xix.2.

trained to fear and hate the light, and since we are in the light, they hate us. But we gladly bear the reproach of Christ!”

According to a bishop close to Serapion:

“The blessed Sotas [a Christian leader] desired to cast the demon out of Priscilla, but the hypocrites did not permit him.”⁵⁶

Montanus’ response:

“If Sotas is blessed, then so is Judas, Simon the Sorcerer, and every other blasphemer. What he tried to do to Prisca was unthinkable, a horrible thing. I am thankful she had brothers there to protect her.”

Accusations from Asterius Urbanus (about AD 232⁵⁷)

Nothing is known of Asterius except his name, which is found in Eusebius’ *Church History* (V.xvi, xvii). As in the case of Serapion, only fragments of his work survive.⁵⁸

According to Asterius:

Montanus “was possessed, . . . under the control of a demon, and was led by a deceitful spirit,” and those like him were possessed by a “false and seductive spirit.”⁵⁹

Montanus’ response:

“You may speak evil of me, Asterius, and be forgiven, but beware lest you speak evil of the holy Spirit of God. If you do that, neither in this world nor the next will you find forgiveness (Mt. 12:32).”

According to Asterius:

Montanus “[had an] unquenchable desire for leadership.”⁶⁰

Montanus’ response:

“I have no desire at all for leadership, Asterius. God called my name and told me what I was to do and what I was to say, and my desire is only to be a faithful servant of God. You should examine your own motives. It is envy of the authority I have in Christ that makes you say such things.”

⁵⁶ Ibid., V.xix.3.

⁵⁷ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, preface, ANF, 7:333.

⁵⁸ A later editor of Eusebius’ *Church History*, perhaps Eusebius himself, added a marginal note to a surviving fragment of this lost work in which he ascribes authorship of these accusations to Asterius Urbanus. No other clue exists as to the authorship. Cf. “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, preface, ANF, 7:333.

⁵⁹ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, IV, ANF, 7:337.

⁶⁰ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.7.

According to Asterius:

Montanus and those like him, “imagining themselves possessed of the holy Spirit and of a prophetic gift, were elated and not a little puffed up . . . and were cheated and deceived by the mad and insidious and seducing spirit.”⁶¹

Montanus’ response:

“It was not our imagination the day Jesus filled us with his Spirit, and it is not our imagination when his Spirit speaks through us. Nor is the Spirit of God an insidious and seducing spirit; it rescues men from their madness, and it rescued us from ours.

“If we were puffed up, Asterius, Jesus would not use us as he is doing. We confess our weakness and utter dependency on Christ for the power and wisdom to live according to the will of God. Anything worth doing, someone has said, is worth doing poorly until it is perfectly done, and that applies to life in the Spirit as well as to life in the flesh. Learning to walk in the Spirit may entail as many failures as attends a toddler’s learning to walk, but walking is worth doing poorly until one learns to walk. So, we confess that we are ever learning to walk more perfectly with Christ.”

According to Asterius:

Montanus and those like him honored the Devil.⁶²

Montanus’ response:

“The Devil is honored when men worship God in the flesh, as you Christians do. God is honored only when His people worship Him in spirit and in truth, as both Jesus and Paul taught.”

According to Asterius:

“The Devil, having devised destruction for those who were disobedient to the Lord’s warning to beware of false prophets (Mt. 7:15), secretly excited and inflamed their minds who had already left the faith which is according to truth.”⁶³

Montanus’ response:

“We did not become who we are by disobeying the Lord’s instructions, but by obeying them. Disobeying Jesus would lead us into the religion you are in, but as we obey him, he keeps us in his love.”

⁶¹ Ibid., V.xvi.8.

⁶² Ibid., V.xvi.9.

⁶³ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, II, ANF, 7:336.

According to Asterius:

Montanus and those like him “play the harlot with error”.⁶⁴

Montanus’ response:

“It is your apostate religion that is the whore, and—hear this man, Asterius!—your religion will become the Great Whore foretold by John in his revelation (Rev. 17:1–6), who sells herself to the spirits of this age in order to gain favor with men and increase in earthly stature. Hear me, my friend, and escape it while you can!”

According to Asterius:

Their prophecy was “a novelty, not a ‘new prophecy’, as they call it, but false prophecy,” and their faith is “heresy”.⁶⁵

Montanus’ response:

“We may seem like a novelty, but that is only because you Christians have forgotten what the power of God feels like and what His truth sounds like. Asterius, those who called Jesus a heretic and demon possessed were themselves demon possessed heretics. A false accusation, my friend, is a confession. I implore you to repent and seek deliverance from that novel Christian Movement you are in!”

Asterius scoffed at what he claimed was a paltry number of Phrygians who were with Montanus,⁶⁶ knowing full well that their numbers had grown to the point of provoking Christian leaders to convene multiple councils to deal with them.⁶⁷ The great success of the gospel of the saints in Phrygia is evidenced by the many passionate treatises written against it by the Christian leaders who felt threatened by it, not only in the second and third centuries, but to this day. Asterius’ description of the saints in Phrygia as few in number was a lie that Asterius knew he was telling; with it, he was hoping to make his readers think that the events in Phrygia were insignificant and, so, secure their allegiance to the Christian Movement.

Finally, the duplicitous Asterius criticized the saints in Phrygia for their complete lack of martyrs,⁶⁸ boasting of the many martyrs that Christians had. But then, having forgotten that he told that lie, he spoke of Phrygian martyrs, saying that when Christian martyrs are thrown into prison with Phrygian martyrs, they refuse to associate with them.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, II, ANF, 7:336.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.4, 8.

⁶⁶ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, I, ANF, 7:336.

⁶⁷ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.10.

⁶⁸ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, III, ANF, 7:336.

⁶⁹ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, VII, ANF, 7:337.

Asterius did not explain how it was that Christian martyrs refused the company of the Phrygian martyrs whom he said did not exist.

Accusations from Apollonius (early- to mid-third century⁷⁰)

Nothing is known about Apollonius except what is found in the fourth-century work of Eusebius. There, Apollonius claims to have written his treatise, of which only fragments survive, forty years after Montanus began his ministry,⁷¹ and Eusebius said that the way of worship Montanus stood for was still being practiced in Phrygia at that time.⁷² Bauer found it hard to believe that Apollonius sincerely believed the outlandish slanders that he hurled at Montanus, and he dismissed Apollonius' invective as "abusive satire."⁷³

Although Apollonius was "clearly as unprincipled and dishonest a writer as the anonymous, and . . . little reliance can be placed upon any of his reports to the discredit of *Montanus and those with him*,"⁷⁴ Eusebius made full use of his material because Eusebius had sold his soul to Constantine's Roman Church, and he welcomed Apollonius' calumny.

According to Apollonius:

Montanus broke up marriages.⁷⁵

Montanus' response:

"I have never set about to break up a marriage, for marriage is of God. Nevertheless, that the truth of Christ divides is undeniable, for Jesus said that he came to bring division—yes, even within families (Lk. 12:51–53). Our purpose and our hope, as Paul said, is peace (1Cor. 7:15b); however,

⁷⁰ Apollonius I, "Remains of the Second and Third Centuries", eds. Roberts, Alexander and James Donaldson, Vol. 8, *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 775.

⁷¹ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.12.

⁷² Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.1, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 1, *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), 235.

⁷³ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 135.

⁷⁴ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.6, 236n13.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, V.xviii.2. This was not a unique charge against those who won people to Christ. Believers who were slaves were also accused of breaking up marriages when their testimonies led their masters' children or wives to the Lord. Cf. Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 647.

concerning unbelieving spouses who reject Christ and abandon their believing mates, I say with the apostle Paul, ‘If the unbelieving depart, let them depart!’ (1Cor. 7:15a). If the truth offend, then let it offend; we have no authority to alter it in order to please men. Ungodly men like you slander God’s messengers when His message brings about the divisions that Jesus said would come, but I will not deny the message in order to please men and avoid the slander.”

According to Apollonius:

Montanus renamed Peruga and Tymius, two small towns in Phrygia, “Jerusalem” because he wanted to gather people there from many places.⁷⁶

Montanus’ response:

“Even if I were stupid enough to have done such a thing, who would be stupid enough to travel to those towns because of it? There is nothing on earth holy except the Spirit which God sent to earth and the people in whom that Spirit dwells.”

According to Apollonius:

Maximilla and others like her “obtained money not only from the rich, but also from the poor, from orphans and widows,” and “received gold and silver and expensive clothes.”⁷⁷

Montanus’ response:

“If people of God are so blessed that they want to support those who have blessed them, that is a sacrifice ‘acceptable and well-pleasing to God’ (Phip. 4:18). For you to suggest that Maximilla plundered the poor is outrageous, and if you could have provided the name of a single widow or orphan whom she plundered, you would have done it. But you cannot.”

According to Apollonius:

Montanus “set up exactors of money,” disguised his lust for money “under the name of voluntary offerings,” and “granted stipends” to those who traveled with the message he preached, “that by means of gluttony, the teaching of his doctrine may prevail.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.18.2.

⁷⁷ Apollonius II, *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages.*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 8, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 776.

⁷⁸ Apollonius I, 8:775.

Montanus' response:

“To condemn honest men who receive offerings from God’s children as being tax collectors is repugnant. You should not do that, Apollonius. We do no wrong in financially supporting those who preach the gospel, and if I appoint men to receive offerings, what did I do but make it easier for the people to give what they wanted to give? You yourself admit that what they give is voluntarily given; so, how can that be a means for me to fulfill a lust for money? Tell me, Apollonius! If what I do is only to get more money, why do I freely give money to others so that they might spread the gospel? No one who knows me believes that I give those men and women money only to entice them to a life of gluttony.”⁷⁹

According to Apollonius:

Maximilla and Montanus only “pretended to prophesy”.⁸⁰

Montanus' response:

“Whether or not Maximilla and I pretended to prophesy, God will judge. In the meantime, Apollonius, I will remind you that an opinion makes nothing true.”

According to Apollonius:

“Maximilla and Priscilla deserted their husbands as soon as they were filled with the Spirit, and the saints in Phrygia lied when they referred to Priscilla as a virgin.”⁸¹

Montanus' response:

“You do not even know whether Maximilla and Prisca *had* husbands. But even if they did, all faithful saints, married or otherwise, are ‘chaste virgins to Christ’ (2Cor. 11:2), which Maximilla and Prisca certainly were. That Maximilla and Prisca forsook their husbands is rank gossip, the plaything of unclean hearts.”

According to Apollonius:

“All Scripture forbids a prophet to receive gifts and money!”⁸²

Montanus' response:

“That is a vain tradition that one of your own started. Why do you Christians teach that if an apostle stays with someone more than two days,

⁷⁹ “The silence of the older anonymous author indicates that the management of money by Montanus and his adherents cannot have taken the unedifying forms scorned by Apollonius.” – Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 137.

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.13.

⁸¹ Apollonius II, 8:775.

⁸² *Ibid.*

he is a false prophet?⁸³ The apostle Paul once stayed with the Corinthians eighteen months (Acts 18:11). And he stayed with the Ephesians three full years, feeding them the knowledge of God (Acts 20:31). Yes, some men of God have refused gifts, but for specific purposes (2Kgs. 5:15–16; 2Cor. 11:9). Others, including Samuel (1Sam. 9:6–8), Paul (Phip. 4:15–18), and Jesus himself (cf. Jn. 12:6; 19:23), received gifts. So, were they false? According to your standard, they were. So, if I am false, I am false just like Jesus and Paul!”

Apollonius also attacked two other Spirit-filled men, Themison and Alexander. Themison appears to have been a leader, since an opponent of the Phrygian saints grumbled that Themison had followers and that he and those with him “bridled the mouths” of eminent Christian men and bishops who had challenged the holy Spirit to a theological debate when it spoke through them.⁸⁴

According to Apollonius:

Themison was clothed in “convincing covetousness”⁸⁵, that is to say that although Themison’s conduct was upright and persuasive, his motive for conducting himself so uprightly was only to deceive people and get their money.

Montanus’ response:

“Themison was a sincere and godly man who was clothed with convincing godliness, not convincing covetousness, and through that godliness, he led many to the Lord. He had not an ounce of covetousness in his soul. Your claim to be able to peer into his heart and see evil there means nothing to me, and even less to God. Christian ministers are the ones who deceive souls with ‘convincing covetousness’, Apollonius, not Themison.”

According to Apollonius:

Themison “with a large sum of money” purchased his release from prison rather than remain there and suffer.⁸⁶

Montanus’ response:

“I don’t know how Themison obtained a release from prison, but if he did so by paying off a fine, that is the magistrate’s business, not yours. If you are charging the Roman magistrate with corruption, then go to the courts

⁸³ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*, 11.4–5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 27.

⁸⁴ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, IV, 7:336.

⁸⁵ Apollonius II, 8:776. Author’s translation.

⁸⁶ Apollonius III, 8:776.

and file your accusation against him! Themison either had the money already or God's people collected enough to have him freed. Either way, the money was used wisely. Only a madman would not leave prison if he had a way out. The apostle Paul told slaves that if they were able to obtain freedom, they should do it (1Cor. 7:21). Would you remain in prison if you could leave it?"

According to Apollonius:

Themison had the audacity "to compose a general epistle in imitation of the apostle."⁸⁷

Montanus' response:

"Where is the crime in writing a letter if a man has something from God to say? You have written much, but what you say is not from God. Who, then, is guilty of imitating the apostles for an evil purpose, Themison or you?"

According to Apollonius:

Themison dared "to instruct those whose faith was better than his⁸⁸ and to contend with Christians using empty-sounding words."⁸⁹

Montanus' response:

"It is not true that Themison was instructing his betters when he called on Christians to repent and walk in the way of the Spirit. Nor are his words "empty-sounding"; they are true and full of convicting power. Otherwise, so many righteous souls would not have listened to him, and you would not have written so much against him."

According to Apollonius:

Themison "uttered blasphemy against the Lord and the apostles and the holy *Christian religion*."⁹⁰

Montanus' response:

"I have no doubt that the religion that you call holy was exposed by Themison as being unholy. I do the same thing, by the grace of God. And I am equally certain that Themison did not revile the Lord and the apostles. Themison spoke from Christ and for Christ in condemning the abomination that you call holy."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii.5.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Apollonius III, 8:776.

According to Apollonius:

Alexander and one of the prophetesses enjoyed frequent banquetings together,⁹¹ the implication of immorality being obvious.

Montanus' response:

“To condemn as immoral wretches the people you Christians oppose has become standard among you, even when you fight among yourselves.⁹² Sinners themselves acknowledge our moral integrity; they know that we do not participate in the ungodly feasts of our heathen neighbors. Your slander of Alexander and the prophetess is evil.”

According to Apollonius:

Alexander was worshipped by many of the believers in Phrygia.⁹³

Montanus' response:

“That is ludicrous. Where do you get these insane ideas?”

According to Apollonius:

Alexander was once a daring robber and criminal, and before becoming a criminal, Alexander was an apostate from the Christian religion.⁹⁴

Montanus' response:

“Do you deny that Jesus cleanses sinners? Whether or not Alexander was once a criminal or a member of your Christian Movement is irrelevant. The blood of Christ can cover a multitude of sins, whether it be the sin of robbery or the sin of belonging to a false religion. The only relevant thing for any of us is how we are living now in the sight of God.”

According to Apollonius:

Alexander deceived good Christians by falsely claiming to belong to the Lord.⁹⁵

Montanus' response:

“God’s children who knew Alexander saw in him such a fine example of righteousness that they bore witness to his uprightness. I know that be-

⁹¹ Apollonius IV, 8:775. Apollonius is hinting that one of the Spirit-filled prophetesses committed fornication with Alexander.

⁹² See Jennifer Wright Knust’s discussion in *Abandoned to Lust*, 1–13. To accuse opponents of debauchery was a rhetorical device in much of classical culture, dating from at least the fourth century BC. Christians had begun the practice by the early second century, adopting the pagans’ way of disputation and “employing tools of rhetoric they shared with their neighbors in ways that served their own persuasive projects”—*Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 13.

⁹³ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xliiii.6.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., V.xviii.9.

lievers are often fooled, Apollonius, but they are fooled by false teachers like you, not by godly men like Alexander who do the right thing when they learn what it is.”

According to Apollonius:

“We are able to prove the like in many other cases besides.”⁹⁶

Montanus’ response:

“You cannot prove the guilt of *any* others, much less *many* others. If you could, you would have already done it. Your slanders have proved nothing about Alexander, Apollonius.”

According to Apollonius:

The Phrygian believers dyed their hair, stained their eyelids, adorned their bodies, played dice and other such games, and lent money on interest.⁹⁷

Modern scholar’s response:

Instead of Montanus, the Editor of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, will provide the response to these silly accusations. He concluded that, in light of the generally acknowledged fact that Montanus and those with him lived a life of self-denial and moral uprightness, “We can look upon [Apollonius’ accusations] as nothing better than baseless slanders. That there might have been an individual here and there whose conduct justified this attack cannot be denied, but to bring such accusations against *those with Montanus*^d in general was both unwarranted and absurd, and Apollonius cannot but have been aware of the fact. His language is rather that of a bully or braggadocio who knows the untruthfulness of his statements, than of a man conscious of his own honesty and of the reliability of his account.”⁹⁸

Any historian who quotes from such an obviously false source as Eusebius did, without distancing himself from the accusations made, makes himself complicit in spreading the false information. Far from distancing himself from Apollonius’ hate-filled judgments of Montanus, Eusebius gladly endorsed them, himself calling those associated with Montanus “poisonous reptiles who crawled all over Asia and Phrygia.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Apollonius IV, 8:776.

⁹⁷ Apollonius V, 8:776.

⁹⁸ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xviii, 236n27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, V.xvi.1.

Accusations from Hippolytus (early-third century)

As with the previous writers, almost nothing is known about Hippolytus, even though much more of his writing is extant.

According to Hippolytus:

The believers in Phrygia were “naturally inclined to heresy”.¹⁰⁰

Montanus’ response:

“Without the sanctifying power of the Spirit, all men are inclined to heresy. That is not the issue. The issue is, whom has Jesus delivered from the heresy to which we are all inclined? I know that he has delivered us, and I know that he has not delivered you, though he will if you repent.”

According to Hippolytus:

The believers in Phrygia were “overrun with delusion”.¹⁰¹

Montanus’ response:

“We are indeed overrun, as you say, but not with delusion. We are overrun with the blessings of God. When the Spirit first came and filled Jesus’ disciples, many stood by and mocked them, saying that they were overrun with drunkenness, but their slander did not make it true, nor did it take God’s blessing away from them. Likewise, your accusations do not diminish God’s power in us one whit! We are blessed with the Spirit now as Jesus’ followers were then, and it frustrates you to have no power to change that.”

According to Hippolytus:

Believers in Phrygia did not use reason to judge what they were told.¹⁰²

Montanus’ response:

“Unless God gives a man right reason, he can only judge according to fleshly lusts. But in Christ, we may judge all things by the reason that God gives, and that makes our judgment true. Carnally minded men such as yourself cannot judge anything rightly” (cf. 1Cor. 2:14–15).

According to Hippolytus:

The believers in Phrygia did not “give heed to those who are competent to make decisions [i.e., Christian leaders].”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII.xii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Montanus' response:

“Those who give heed to the men you would have us to follow are led astray. Those men are blind guides leading the blind, knowing nothing of Christ’s power and truth. And we will certainly not follow them, now that Jesus has rescued us and called us to follow him instead.”

According to Hippolytus:

Maximilla and Priscilla were “imposters” from whom the gullible saints in Phrygia believed they had “learned something more through these [women] than from the law, and the prophets, and the Gospels. They magnify these wretched women above the apostles and every gift of grace, so that some of them presume to assert that there is in them something superior to Christ.”¹⁰⁴

Montanus' response:

“Other than you Christians saying it, there is not a shred of evidence to show that believers in Phrygia ever thought that I, Maximilla, or Prisca, or anyone else is equal to Christ, much less superior to him. And if you would report what we actually said instead of spreading disinformation about us, God’s people would see that for themselves. Why don’t you repeat the truth we speak so that people can make sound judgments about us, instead of filling their ears with so much dirt that they cannot hear the word of God?”

According to Hippolytus:

In addition to breaking up marriages, Montanus and his women instituted new fasts, feasts, and meals of parched food and radishes.¹⁰⁵

Montanus' response:

“We instituted nothing. Communion with God is only in the Spirit, and we preach no other communion. Fasting in Christ is also spiritual, as opposed to the Old Testament fasts, which were in the flesh. You Christians are the ones who have instituted ceremonial meals and new fasts, and you cannot even agree among yourselves how often you should perform them or how many fasts there should be, or when! But one thing you condemned me for, I will confess: I do like radishes. But it doesn’t matter what you decide about any of those things because your whole religion doesn’t matter; the whole thing is evil.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

According to Hippolytus:

“The majority of their books are silly, and their attempts at reasoning weak, and worthy of no consideration.”¹⁰⁶

Montanus’ response:

“All human reasoning is weak and unworthy of consideration when it comes to the things of God. But if it is true that our books are silly and unworthy of consideration, why don’t you publish what we have written and show everybody how silly we are? Instead, Hippolytus, you publish things we have never said and declare that we said it, while refusing to publish what we actually say. If men like you had the power, you would destroy every word we ever wrote and leave only the slander that is spoken against us. But even if you do, the God of all justice will one day raise up from among His people someone who loves the praise of God more than the praise of man, and he will glorify God alone and vindicate me, and expose your work as silly and unworthy of consideration!”

Didymus the Blind (c. 311–c. 397)

Didymus, a theologian in Alexandria, Egypt, wrote after the Synthesis and was committed to the foundational doctrine of the Roman Universal Church: the Holy Trinity. Montanus had been dead about two hundred years, but that did not deter Didymus from condemning him.

According to Didymus the Blind:

“The Phrygians do not baptize in the name of the three holy hypostases.”¹⁰⁷

Montanus’ response:

“What in the world are ‘holy hypostases’, and why would anyone want to baptize like that? Baptism in water is bad enough by any name, but to say, ‘I baptize you in the name of the three holy hypostases’, is really weird, Didymus. Wherever you got that, you should take it back.”

According to Didymus the Blind:

“The Phrygians are uneducated and thick in mind.”¹⁰⁸

Montanus’ response:

“I may indeed be thickheaded, Didymus; my mother once told me I was, when I was a boy. But no man who knows God is uneducated.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Didymus the Blind (c.311–c.397), *Ancient & Medieval References To Montanism*, “On the Trinity”, 2:15, eds. Daniel R. Jennings M.A., date accessed 2/6/2024, <http://danielrjennings.org/AncientReferencesToMontanism.html#Didymus>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., “On the Trinity”, 3:18.

According to Didymus the Blind:

“The Phrygians believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the same.”¹⁰⁹

Montanus’ response:

“Why should I teach that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not the same? The Spirit is God without His body, and the apostle said that the Son is ‘the reflection of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being’ (Heb. 1:3). So, how are they not the same?”¹¹⁰

According to Didymus the Blind:

Montanus taught, in effect, that Jesus said, “I am the Father, the Son, and the Paraclete.”¹¹¹

Montanus’ response:

“Not only did Jesus never say that, I never said that he said it.”

According to Didymus the Blind:

Paul wrote, “When perfection comes, then what is imperfect will be abolished,” and based on that, the Phrygians “claim that Montanus is come and that he was the perfection of the Paraclete, that is, that of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹²

Montanus’ response:

“I knew a lot of Phrygians, but nobody I knew ever said that about me. How can any man be the holy Ghost, when it came from heaven a few days after Jesus ascended?”

According to Didymus the Blind:

“Montanus was once a priest for an idol.”¹¹³

Montanus’ response:

“No, Didymus, you Christians are the worshippers of idols, with your ‘holy water’ and ‘holy bread and wine’ and ‘holy places’. All of that is idolatry. The apostle John warned God’s children to stay away from idols (1Jn. 5:21), and he warned us to be diligent about it. He said, ‘Take heed

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ The Roman Church’s doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for which Didymus was arguing, was not known to anyone in Montanus’ day. Montanus would not have known what to think of such philosophical babble.

¹¹¹ Didymus the Blind, “On the Trinity”, 3:41.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. Some said that Montanus was formerly a priest of the goddess Cybele, the Great Mother goddess, while others said he was a priest of the god Apollo. Cf. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 63; Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 11–12.

to yourselves, lest we lose the things we have worked for, but that we may receive a full reward' (2Jn. 1:8). So, I will stay away from your idols and live in such a way that I receive a full reward."

According to Didymus the Blind:

"Christ and the Apostles were believed by all and were not disbelieved, as Montanus is."¹¹⁴

Montanus' response:

"Christ and his apostles were believed by all? If you were not blind, you'd be able to read the Scriptures for yourself and see what a crazy statement that is. God's prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus were not only disbelieved, but they were also despised by the majority of God's own people. As an old man, Paul said that all the believers in my native Phrygia had forsaken the truth he taught them, the truth he received from Christ (2Tim. 1:15). Your blindness, Didymus, is complete; it is both spiritual and physical."

According to Didymus the Blind:

Priscilla and Maximilla wrote books for Montanus, in which they say that we do not believe the Savior who said, "Behold, I will send you prophets, wise men, and scribes." But Jesus was not speaking of sending women to write books! "Concerning prophetesses, the Scripture knows the four daughters of Philip, and Deborah, and Mariam the sister of Aaron, and Mary the mother of God. . . . But the Scriptures do not know books written under the name of any women! [Paul] has forbidden this when he wrote to Timothy, 'I do not permit women to teach.' [So then,] Montanus has neither known or possessed the holy Spirit because he has had thoughts contrary to Christ regarding the role of women."¹¹⁵

Montanus' response:

"You are straining at a gnat, Didymus. If God uses a woman to speak, as you yourself admit He has done, and she then writes down what the Spirit said through her, why do you think that is evil? The only thing that matters is whether or not God has really spoken. And He has certainly spoken through the two prophetesses I know. I will take what Maximilla and Prisca have written over anything you Christian ministers say. And as for Paul forbidding women to teach, not only did he disapprove of women teaching; he also disapproved of men teaching if they had nothing from God to say. But he never disapproved of the holy Ghost teaching, whether

¹¹⁴ Didymus the Blind, "On the Trinity", 3:41.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

through men or women. Maximilla and Prisca were right in saying that you who do not believe the prophets whom Jesus has sent do not believe the Jesus who said that he would send them. You people are worshipping a Jesus of your own imagination. And one more thing. God does not have a mother. Where did you get that crazy idea?"

Accusations from Epiphanius (late-fourth century)

Epiphanius is a major source of slander against Montanus, second only to Eusebius. Like Didymus the Blind, he came after the Synthesis. He was born into a Jewish family but became a Christian at an early age. He is best known for his compendium of heresies, *The Panarion*, in which he includes a strong condemnation of Montanus and those like him.

According to Epiphanius:

The believers in Phrygia "boast of having one Montanus as a prophet, and Priscilla and Maximilla as prophetesses."¹¹⁶

Montanus' response:

"We boast only in the Lord, as Paul said to do (1Cor. 1:31). We do not boast in ourselves, or in any man."

According to Epiphanius:

"By paying heed to [Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla], the believers in Phrygia lost their wits."¹¹⁷

Montanus' response:

"We are spiritually minded people, as we should be; you Christians are carnally minded people, as you should not be (Rom. 8:6). We have indeed lost our minds, and we thank God for it, for we have received the mind of Christ instead (cf. 1Cor. 2:16). Would to God that you would lose your mind as well, so that we could understand the truth together and serve God in one accord."

According to Epiphanius:

The believers in Phrygia separated themselves by "giving heed to seducing spirits."¹¹⁸

Montanus' response:

"We did not separate ourselves. Christ separated us from you and your religion when he revealed his truth to us. You are the seducers, who offer

¹¹⁶ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.1.3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 48.1.4.

people empty promises of eternal life in exchange for their loyalty to your apostate religion.”

According to Epiphanius:

“The Phrygians are not of the saints themselves. They went out by their contentiousness, and gave heed to spirits of error and fictitious stories.”¹¹⁹

Montanus’ response:

“We do what we do in obedience to Christ, and we humbly contend for the Faith, as the man of God commanded us to do (Jude 1:3). Call that contentiousness if you like, but there is no evil in contending for the truth in the meekness of Christ. It was no spirit of error that called us away from the abomination that you think is holy. And God has given us testimonies that are not fictitious, and you would do well to hear them.”

According to Epiphanius:

Montanus and others are “ravaging wolves”.¹²⁰

Montanus’ response:

“God will judge who is plundering His flock, and each will receive a just reward from Him. I am warning you, Epiphanius, that ministers of your religion are the wolves in sheep’s clothing of which Jesus spoke (Mt. 7:15). I know that you can’t see it, but what am I to do, since I can? We are like sheep in wolves’ clothing, for we are true, but we are covered over with so many slanders that many are afraid of us.”

According to Epiphanius:

“Maximilla and her like will be exposed as false prophets, since they dared to receive inspiration after the end of the prophetic gifts—not from the Holy Spirit but from Devils’ imposture—and delude her audience.”¹²¹

Montanus’ response:

“Who told you that the gifts of God ended? Has the reign of Christ ended? Has the Spirit of God departed from the earth? The end of gifts like ours may indeed come after we are gone, as Maximilla had said, but it will happen only if those who believe in Jesus refuse them, and you are telling them to do so. You are driving the Spirit away, glorying in a false gospel that has no power to save. And yet, just as Jesus and the apostle Paul predicted (Mt. 24:10–11; 1Tim. 4:1), many are carried away with your new religion, and they are taught by you to speak evil of those who tell the truth.”

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 48.1.7

¹²⁰ Ibid., 48.3.2.

¹²¹ Ibid., 48.2.3.

According to Epiphanius:

“Every prophet, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, prophesied with understanding. [They] delivered all the prophecies . . . with sound mind and rational intellect, with composure and understanding.”¹²²

Montanus’ response:

“You fool! Man’s mind and intellect have nothing whatsoever to do with true prophecy. Do you not know that the prophets of Israel longed to understand their own prophecies (1Pet. 1:10–12)? Even when the Spirit spoke through them about things they *did* understand, they only understood those things after the Spirit spoke, not before. Their minds were not involved in the words they said, just as our minds are not involved when we speak with other tongues (1Cor. 14:14).”

According to Epiphanius:

“Everything the prophets have said, they said rationally and with understanding, and the things they said have come true and are still coming true.”¹²³

Montanus’ response:

“The very reason their prophecies come true is that those prophecies came by the Spirit of God, not by men’s understanding.”

According to Epiphanius:

True prophecy “is the speech of a sober person who is not out of his senses, and not that the words were delivered as speech from a mind distraught.”¹²⁴

Montanus’ response:

“What makes you think that when a man’s mind is not involved, his mind is distraught? I am happy when God bypasses my mind to speak through me. Epiphanius, you know nothing about prophecy; you have never experienced the power of the holy Ghost, have you?”

According to Epiphanius:

“When the Phrygians profess to prophesy, it is plain that they are not sound of mind, and rational.”¹²⁵

Montanus’ response:

“We are of no mind at all, sound or otherwise, when we prophesy, except the mind of Christ.”

¹²² Ibid., 48.10.1; 48.3.1; 48.3.4.

¹²³ Ibid., 48.2.5.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 48.3.6.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 48.3.11.

According to Epiphanius:

Montanus and those like him deserted the truth, estranged themselves from it, and then, being “caught outside the fold, were dragged off by the Devil, and they surrendered themselves to destruction.”¹²⁶

Montanus’ response:

“At birth, all men are estranged from the truth, and we all remain estranged from it until we surrender to Christ, who alone can lead men out of darkness and into truth, which I hope never to desert. If we were dragged off by anyone, Epiphanius, we were dragged off by Jesus, away from darkness and into the light of God.”

According to Epiphanius:

“Montanus is outside the body of the church and the Head of all, and ‘does not hold the Head, from whom the whole body, knit together, increases,’ as scripture says.”¹²⁷

Montanus’ response:

“I am indeed outside your Roman Universal Church, and it is because I hold fast to the Head of the body of Christ that I am out of it, and as long as I hold on to him, I will stay out of it, for the Church is not the body of Christ. We live happily outside your camp, though we suffer many reproaches because of it, but when Jesus appears, we will rejoice even more, and you will bury your faces in the dust for shame, as Isaiah said: ‘Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake said, “Let the LORD be glorified!” but He shall appear to your joy, and they will be ashamed’ (Isa. 66:5). Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice and will never follow a stranger’ (Jn. 10:27a, 5a). Those with pure hearts know Jesus’ voice. You do not recognize his voice because your heart is not pure.”

According to Epiphanius:

The Lord has set his seal on the Church, and Montanus went astray from it.¹²⁸

Montanus’ response:

“The seal of God is the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), and He has set His seal upon us, not the Church. Repent, Epiphanius, and come out from among those who are cursed by Christ, ‘their conscience seared with a hot iron’ (1Tim. 4:1b–2). The seal of damnation is God’s seal on your Church, and it is a seal you do not want, Epiphanius.”

¹²⁶ Ibid., 48.2.8.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 48.11.10.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 48.3.1.

According to Epiphanius:

Montanus' religion is false.¹²⁹

Montanus' response:

"False religion is religion without the power and truth of God's Spirit. Even if men speak highly of Jesus and the Father, if the Spirit does not speak to or through them, they are false. They may honor God with their mouth, but God is not taken in by flattery (cf. Isa. 29:13; Mt. 15:8)."

According to Epiphanius:

"If, from frailty, someone needs to contract a second marriage after the death of his wife, the rule of the truth does not prohibit this—that is, provided he is not a priest. But these people do forbid it—'forbidding to marry,' as scripture says (1Tim. 4:1–3). They expel anyone who has contracted a second marriage."¹³⁰

Montanus' response:

"Why do you condemn us for what you yourselves do? You admit that those you call priests are forbidden to marry, but the truth is that everyone who believes is a priest to God (Rev. 1:6), and anyone in Christ may marry whom he will, only in the Lord, just as Paul said (1Cor. 7:39). I have never expelled anyone from our fellowship for doing that. Why don't you publish what we actually teach? Show us—publish it now for all to see—where I have written any such thing. You offer no proof of such a statement by me because none exists. We teach, as did Jesus and Paul, that under certain circumstances, believers may remarry (Mt. 19:9; Rom. 7:1–2).

"Your leaders at the Council of Elvira—as you well know—forbade your ministers to marry and commanded those who were married to neglect their duty to their wives, contrary to what Paul commanded (1Cor. 7:3–6)! At Elvira, your leaders made this decree: 'Bishops, presbyters, and deacons and all other clerics having a position in the ministry are ordered to abstain completely from their wives and not to have children. Whoever, in fact, does this shall be expelled from the dignity of the clerical state.'¹³¹ And *you* dare to condemn *me*, Epiphanius, as forbidding marriage? Even for you, that is an astonishing hypocrisy!"

¹²⁹ Ibid., 48.4.2.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 48.9.6.

¹³¹ "The Canons of Elvira 309", Canon 33, Celibacy, Sex, & the Catholic Church, Patrick J. Wall, date accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.awrsipe.com/patrick_wall/selected_documents/309%20Council%20of%20Elvira.pdf.

According to Epiphanius:

“It was to make us secure and distinguish the Holy Universal Church from the imposture of sects that Paul said how arrogantly the sects which forbid matrimony and prescribe abstinence from foods prohibit God’s good ordinances by law.”¹³²

Montanus’ response:

“Paul said that we may eat whatever we like (1Tim. 4:4), and we agree with him. Yours is the religion that would dictate to people what they can eat, and even what they can think and say. Your religion would control every aspect of our lives, as Rome has always done. Listen to this prophet, O Epiphanius! Unless you Christians turn from your ungodly ways, you will become the world’s consummate oppressor and destroyer of men’s souls, even as you claim to serve Christ!”

According to Epiphanius:

“Montanus is in total disagreement with the sacred scriptures, as any attentive reader can see.”¹³³

Montanus’ response:

“How could I be in disagreement with the Scriptures when I say what the Scriptures say? What have I said contrary to the Scriptures? Do more than condemn! Present evidence, if you can!”

According to Epiphanius:

“Since Montanus is in total disagreement with the sacred Scriptures, he and the sect which boasts of having prophets and gifts are strangers to the Holy Universal Church. He did not receive these gifts; he departed from them.”¹³⁴

Montanus’ response:

“We thank God that we are strangers to Rome’s ‘Holy Universal Church’. And as for departing from the gifts of God, where in Rome’s Church are the gifts from which we departed? Do you prophesy, Epiphanius? Do you speak with tongues and interpret them? Jesus made us strangers to your religion when he graced us with the gifts from God, to which you are a stranger.”

¹³² Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.9.3.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 48.11.4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.11.4.

According to Epiphanius:

“It is plain that the holy apostles glorified the Lord after receiving the Paraclete Spirit, while this Montanus glorifies himself.”¹³⁵

Montanus’ response:

“Everything I preach glorifies the Lord Jesus because the Lord sent me to preach it. Everything you say glorifies you in the sight of men because Jesus did not send you to say it, just as the Lord told his disciples: ‘He who speaks on his own is seeking his own glory’ (Jn. 7:18).”

According to Epiphanius:

“This pathetic little nobody, Montanus, says, ‘Neither angel nor messenger, but I the Lord, God the Father, have come.’ Our Lord Jesus Christ confessed that he was a Son, but Montanus claims that he is the Father.” Ha! Montanus says that he is the Father Almighty!¹³⁶

Montanus’ response:

“That is blasphemous nonsense. God may speak as Himself when He speaks through us, saying, ‘I’, but when I speak of God, I say, ‘He’. I do not claim to be God, but He has claimed me and made me His servant. I will not quench the Spirit to satisfy fools like you who are without it!”

According to Epiphanius:

Montanus, you “will be exposed as a heretic, for you are not glorifying Christ, whom every regular gift which has been given in the Holy Church has truly glorified.”¹³⁷

Montanus’ response:

“Man glorifies Christ only as he yields himself as a living sacrifice to God and is filled with His Spirit. Where are your gifts, O mighty man? The Spirit does nothing through you.”

According to Epiphanius:

“When you Phrygians say you left the Church over gifts of grace, how can we believe you? Even though you are disguised with the title of ‘Christian,’ you have launched another enemy attack on us.”¹³⁸

Montanus’ response:

“We never claimed to have left what you call the Church. How could we? It did not even exist when I lived. But what we did leave behind to follow

¹³⁵ Ibid., 48.11.6.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 48.11.9, 6.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 48.11.9.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 48.12.1.

Christ was well worth the persecution that it brought. The heathen think it strange that God's children do not carouse with them (cf. 1Pet. 4:3–4), and you think it strange that we do not share in your delusions. You can have the title 'Christian'; we are satisfied with Christ."

According to Epiphanius:

"You have taken up the barbarians' quarrel and mimicked the enmity of the Trojans, who were also Phrygians!"¹³⁹

Montanus' response:

"If the barbarians quarrel with you and say that they don't want your religion, then I congratulate them, and then tell them about the real Jesus. We rejected your religion because the real Jesus filled us with the real Spirit of God and showed us the truth—and that has nothing to do with Trojans, or with the Romans, who claim to be their descendants! The Trojans were brought down a thousand years ago, and you Romans will suffer the same fate. But we will live forever with Christ Jesus!"

According to Epiphanius:

"You introduced us to—Maximilla! Even your names are different and scary, with nothing pleasant and melodious about them."¹⁴⁰

Montanus' response:

"So, you think that God requires a prophet to have a pretty name? And if Jesus Christ sends someone to you with a name you don't like, then you condemn him as false? You are a fool, Epiphanius."

According to Epiphanius:

"This Maximilla, who belongs to these so-called Phrygians—listen to what she says: 'Hearken not unto me, but hearken unto Christ!' . . . Even where she seemed to be glorifying Christ, she was wrong. . . . But in the act of lying, she is telling the truth, even against her will. She is right to say not to listen to her, but to Christ. Unclean spirits are often forced to denounce themselves. . . . Now, how can those who have heard this from her, and believed her, care to listen to her when they have learned from her not to listen to her, but to the Lord! In fact, if they had any sense, they shouldn't listen to her, since her oracles are of the earth."¹⁴¹

Montanus' response:

"That is the childish logic of a schoolyard bully. Those who gave heed to Maximilla when Christ spoke through her were *not* hearing her; they were

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 48.12.3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 48.12.4, 5, 6, 8.

hearing Christ, just as she exhorted them to do, and they were blessed for doing so, for God promised to bless those who believe His prophets (2Chron. 20:20b). Moreover, the Scriptures warn us to heed the voice that speaks from heaven (Heb. 12:25). Maximilla did not *seem* to glorify Christ; she did glorify him. Your religion is what *seems* to honor Christ, for you are masters of appearances, but with your ceremonial works, you deny him (Tit. 1:16), and in the last day, he will deny you!”

According to Epiphanius:

“Phrygians also venerate a deserted spot in Phrygia, a town once called Pepuza, though it is now leveled, and say that the heavenly Jerusalem will descend there. And they resort there, celebrate certain mysteries on the site, and, as they suppose, sanctify [themselves].”¹⁴²

Montanus’ response:

“Men were able to sanctify themselves in the Old Testament (e.g., Lev. 11:44), but not in this one. And it is contrary to the gospel to venerate anything or any place on this cursed earth. Your religion does that, venerating ‘holy water’, ‘holy bread and wine’, ‘holy places’, and even ‘holy corpses’. We venerate God alone, and His Son, Jesus. The flesh has no part in our worship, and that makes it a mystery to you who love the flesh and hate the truth.”

According to Epiphanius:

“I shall also speak, in its turn, of the ‘Tascodrugians’. [Montanus and those with him] are called Tascodrugians for the following reason. Their word for ‘peg’ is ‘tascus,’ and ‘drugus’ is their word for ‘nostril’ or ‘snout.’ And since they put their licking finger, as we call it, on their nostril when they pray, for dejection, if you please, and would-be righteousness, some people have given them the name Tascodrugians, or ‘nose-peggers.’”¹⁴³

Montanus’ response:

“That is disgusting. Why don’t you report what we really do instead of repeating such transparent falsehood?”

According to Epiphanius:

“At a certain festival they pierce a child—just a little baby—all over its body with bronze needles and get its blood for sacrifice. . . . They stab the

¹⁴² Ibid., 48.14.1, 2. This outlandish slander persists to this day among some historians, but the fact that none of Montanus’ earlier critics mentioned it argues conclusively against its veracity. See Trevett, 99.

¹⁴³ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.14.3, 4.

body of an innocent child and get its blood to drink, and delude their victims by [pretending] that this is initiation in the name of Christ.”¹⁴⁴

Montanus’ response:

“That is a horrible thing to accuse anyone of. Surely, you know that the apostles preached that the Spirit is the blood of Christ¹⁴⁵ and exhorted us to drink of the Spirit (1Cor. 12:13). And you must also know that because of that, Pagans accused believers of drinking the blood of human sacrifices.¹⁴⁶ And you now echo those pagan accusations against us! We confess that we eat the body of Christ and drink of his blood, as Jesus commanded us to do (Jn. 6:48–58), but it is not physical. After Jesus commanded his disciples to eat his body and drink his blood, he explained to them, ‘The words that I say to you, they are spirit and they are life’ (Jn. 6:63).”

According to Epiphanius:

“I promised to withhold nothing about any sect I know, but to disclose what I have learned by word of mouth, and from treatises, documents, and persons who truly confirmed my notion. Thus, by writing no more than I know, I will [not] appear to be guilty of inventing my own false charges against people.”¹⁴⁷

Montanus’ response:

“You can try to escape God’s judgment by putting the blame on others, Epiphanius, but it will do you no good. God will hold you responsible for publishing these lies.”

According to Epiphanius:

“I give all the facts, as I said, with accuracy about each sect, and make these shocking disclosures for the readers’ correction.”¹⁴⁸

Montanus’ response:

“Your ‘shocking disclosures’ are neither factual nor accurate, and if you were a man of integrity, you would never have repeated them. You made these ‘shocking disclosures’ for your own benefit to persuade people of your Christian Movement and to please those who hate the truth.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.15.6, 7.

¹⁴⁵ For the many references for this, see the gospel tract, “The Blood of Christ”, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

¹⁴⁶ E.g., Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, IX.5–6, trans. Gerald H. Rendall, *Loeb Classical Library 250* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 337–338.

¹⁴⁷ *Epiphanius, The Panarion*, 48.15.1.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 48.15.3.

According to Epiphanius:

“I have crushed its poison, and the venom on its hooked fangs, with the cudgel of the truth of the cross.”¹⁴⁹

Montanus' response:

“The cross! The cross! Would to God that you knew the living Jesus who is no longer on the cross! You are hiding from him behind the cross. Your adoration of that Roman tool of torture is despicable. Jesus despises that cross, and so does his Father. And so do I.

“The cross that Christ bore was spiritual; it was to do the will of the Father, which, for Jesus, included being nailed to the hateful Roman cross. My cross was to endure the scorn of wicked men like you while I preached Christ crucified, risen, and reigning now in glory at God's right hand! Yours is the poisonous venom, Epiphanius, and it glorifies Rome and its cross! By placing that torture stake on top of your churches, you confess that if Jesus came again, you and the Romans would do to him now what you did to him the first time he came. You hate the power and truth of Christ because your heart is polluted with love for Rome!”

According to Epiphanius:

“You Phrygians say we must receive the gifts of grace.”¹⁵⁰

Montanus' response:

“Men must receive the Spirit, not necessarily the gifts of it. The gifts of the Spirit are given by God as He chooses, as an added measure of the Spirit that He gives to sinners who repent. Try to understand me. The gift of faith is an added measure of the faith that all God's children have. Where two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name, prayer may be made in faith. That is why James said that the prayer of faith would heal the sick (Jas. 5:15); he was telling them that their prayers could touch God's heart, not that they all had the gift of faith, or the gift of healing.

“Likewise, the gift of diverse tongues is for those through whom the Spirit has already spoken when they received it. The apostle John said that the Spirit of God is known by the sound it makes when it enters us: ‘By this, the Spirit of God is known: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ when he has come into a person is of God’ (1Jn. 4:2). That sound is not the gift of diverse tongues which Paul mentioned (1Cor. 12:10); it is the sound that Jesus said is present every time a person is born again: ‘The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear its sound. . . . So is everyone who is

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.15.6.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.1.4; 48.2.1.

born of the Spirit' (Jn. 3:8). The gift of diverse tongues is for ministry and edification of the body of Christ; the sound made by God's Spirit when it enters into someone lets everyone know who has the Spirit and who does not. If you had ever stood in the counsels of God, you would know that."

Accusations from Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313–386)

Cyril was a post-Synthesis theologian and bishop of Carthage, best known for the lectures he gave to candidates for Christian baptism, the *Catechetical Lectures*, from which the following accusations are taken.

According to Cyril of Jerusalem:

"This Montanus, who was out of his mind and really mad, dared to say that he was himself the Holy Ghost."¹⁵¹

Montanus' response:

"You Christians have repeated that lie so many times that I think you are actually starting to believe it. How can a mortal man be the holy Ghost?"

According to Cyril of Jerusalem:

Montanus was "filled with all uncleanness and lasciviousness. It suffices but to hint at this, out of respect for the women who are present."¹⁵²

Montanus' response:

"Out of respect for the men and women who are present, why don't you tell the truth instead of hinting at a lie? You know nothing about me except what you have heard from other Christian liars like you."

According to Cyril of Jerusalem:

"Having taken possession of Pepuza, a very small hamlet of Phrygia, he falsely named it Jerusalem."¹⁵³

Montanus' response:

"I never took possession of a town. We are looking for a city far better than any on this earth, a 'city which has foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God' (Heb. 11:10)."

According to Cyril of Jerusalem:

Those with Montanus worshipped God by "cutting the throats of wretched little children, and chopping them up into unholy food, for the purpose of

¹⁵¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVI.8, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 7, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1894), 117.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

their so-called mysteries (wherefore till but lately in the time of persecution we were suspected of doing this because these Montanists were called, falsely indeed, by the common name of Christians).¹⁵⁴

Montanus' response:

“Sinners did not accuse you of such things because of anything we do; they accuse all believers of such things because they misunderstood Jesus’ words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood (cf. Jn. 6:48–58). And now, you accuse us of the same monstrosities because you have more in common with sinners in darkness than with us in the light.”

According to Cyril of Jerusalem:

Because Montanus was filled “with all impiety and inhuman cruelty, [he was] condemned by an irrevocable sentence.”¹⁵⁵

Montanus' response:

“God’s damnation is the only ‘irrevocable sentence’, and His condemnation alone is to be feared, not yours.”

Accusations from Athanasius (296?–373)

Athanasius was a bishop in Alexandria, Egypt, and a leading proponent of the novel doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

According to Athanasius:

“The Phrygians say that the Prophets and the other ministers of the Word know neither what they do nor concerning what they announce.”¹⁵⁶

Montanus' response:

“You misunderstand us. What we are saying is that when the Spirit speaks through God’s prophets and ministers, it is not from their own minds that the words come; it is from the mind of Christ.”

According to Athanasius:

“Montanus and those with him claim that to them, first, the true gospel has been revealed, not to the apostles.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians*, III.xiii.47, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 4, *A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.R. Eerdmans Publishing. Co., First published UK: Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1885), 419.

¹⁵⁷ Athanasius, *De Synodis*, Part I.4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 4, *A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.R. Eerdmans Publishing. Co., First published UK: Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1885), 452.

Montanus' response:

“We have never made such an outrageous claim.”

According to Athanasius:

“They say ‘from us dates the faith of Christians.’”¹⁵⁸

Montanus' response:

“We have nothing to do with the starting date of your Christian Movement. We repudiate it. Don't date it from us!”

Accusation from the Council of Constantinople (381)

The Council of Constantinople is one of the earliest ecumenical councils of the Roman Universal Church. It is accepted as legitimate by a large number of Roman and Eastern Orthodox Christians, and some Protestant denominations.

According to the Council of Constantinople:

Montanus taught contrary to the Church's doctrine of the Holy Trinity.¹⁵⁹

Montanus' response:

“I never heard of a Holy Trinity. What is that? What I taught was consistent with what Jesus taught, and what the apostles taught, and every sane person in Christ that I know of. Even some of my worst critics said that my doctrine was sound.¹⁶⁰ Are you so desperate to find a way to justify your false religion that you will invent new doctrines and then complain because I did not teach them?¹⁶¹ You know, it's a strange thing to be condemned for teaching contrary to something that's mentioned nowhere in Scripture and that nobody ever heard of. What kind of monster have you Christians made me out to be, that you cannot be satisfied with past slanders but keep inventing new ones?”

Accusation from Macarius Magnes (c. 400)

Macarius Magnes was a Christian apologist.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Council of Constantinople (381), Canon VII, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 14, *Council of Trullo, Canon 55, The Seven Ecumenical Councils: A Select Library of the Christian and Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 185.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.1.3–4. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII.xii.

¹⁶¹ Some of the earliest “fathers” of the Church also taught contrary to the Trinity doctrine. Cf. Book 3 of this Series, *The Apostate Fathers*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

According to Macarius Magnes:

“Montanus in Phrygia underwent in the name of the Lord an ascetic and unnatural course of life, revealing himself as the abode of a baneful demon, and feeding on his error through all the land of Mysia as far as that of Asia. And so great was the power of the hidden demon which lurked within him, that he very nearly tainted the whole world with the poison of his error.”¹⁶²

Montanus' response:

“My fellow workers and I did travel with the gospel, and the Lord was with us in power, and we accomplished much, providing needed nourishment for the souls of God's people. But we could have done much more had it not been for men like you, Macarius, who feed them poison and command them to refuse the manna that comes from heaven.”

Accusation from Jerome (347–420)

Jerome was a priest, theologian, historian, Bible translator (The Vulgate), and doctor of the Roman Universal Church. He is one of the most revered Churchmen in history.

According to Jerome:

“Montanus, that mouthpiece of an unclean spirit, used two rich and high-born ladies, Prisca and Maximilla, first to bribe and then to pervert many churches.”¹⁶³

Montanus' response:

“I'm impressed, Jerome. I thought I had heard it all, but after all the slanders that have been hurled at us for two and a half centuries, you were able to come up with a new one. That took some doing, and I predict that the Roman Church will reward you handsomely for your cleverness. But tell me, what would it matter, had Maximilla and Prisca actually been born wealthy? They never bribed anybody to win them over; indeed, they had nothing to which to win people except Christ, and he is all they ever offered to people. And as for your congregations, it is not possible that we perverted them because they were already being perverted when God raised us up.”

¹⁶² Macarius Magnes, *The Apocriticus of Macarius Magnes*, IV.XV, trans. T. W. Crafer, date accessed: February 7, 2024 (New York: Macmillian Company 1919), https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/macarius_apocriticus.htm#4_6.

¹⁶³ Jerome, *Jerome to Ctesiphon*, Letter CXXXIII.4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 6, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (New York, The Christian Literature Company, 1893), 275.

Accusations from Augustine (354–430)

Augustine is also numbered among the most revered Churchmen in history. He was a priest, theologian, and doctor of the Roman Church.

According to Augustine:

“The Phrygians think that Paul was ignorant of truth that they now possess because Paul said, ‘We know in part.’ And they claim that the perfection which Paul said would come, came in Montanus.”¹⁶⁴

Montanus’ response:

“Jesus is the perfect one who came and who is coming again, not I. And Paul preached the full gospel of God, though knowing only in part, as he said. I have never said anything else.”

According to Augustine:

They forbid remarriage under any circumstance, even to widows.¹⁶⁵

Montanus’ response:

“We forbid no such thing. You Christians are hypocrites, condemning us for what you yourselves do. You are the ones who forbid marriage to ministers, and to nuns as well, the Vestal Virgins of your apostate religion, and you forbid certain foods to be eaten, just as Paul foretold that you would do, prophesying that ‘some will fall away from the faith, following after deceptive spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods’”(1Tim. 4:1b–3).

According to Augustine:

“Those heretics say that the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord promised he would send, came in the person of some crazy people, namely Montanus and Priscilla.”¹⁶⁶

Montanus’ response:

“You have a reputation for being profound, Augustine, and I believe it, for this old gossip is profoundly false.”

¹⁶⁴ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus*, Letter XXXII.17, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. 4, *The Writings Against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), 338.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, “Augustine to Ceretius, Letter CCXXXVII.2”, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, trans. Roland Teske (Hydepark, New York, New City Press, 2005), 137, <https://wesleyscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Augustine-Letters-211-270.pdf>.

Accusations from *Praedestinatus* (fifth century)

The author of *Praedestinatus* is unknown. It is a series of three books that enumerates and condemns ninety heresies. Included in them is what the author says Montanus preached.

According to Praedestinatus:

You Cataphrygians are the twenty-sixth heresy to rise up in this dispensation.¹⁶⁷

Montanus' response:

“You Christians are the first, laying claim to the name ‘Christian’, which saints of old earned through righteousness and suffering. You are not the spiritual descendants of those saints; you are nothing like them. What arrogance! First, you crowned yourselves ‘Christians’, as if you are worthy of the name, and then named your false religion after Christ, as if it is worthy of him. You are lying to the world about who you are and what your Movement really is!”

According to Praedestinatus:

Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla claim that the Holy Spirit, which the Lord promised to send, is in themselves rather than the apostles.¹⁶⁸

Montanus' response:

“That is not true. We know the apostles received the Spirit, and we know that we did, too.”

According to Praedestinatus:

Montanus and his fellows “consider second marriages [after widowhood] to be fornication, and say the apostle Paul permitted them [because] he knew only in part and prophesied only in part, for that which is perfect had not yet come. But this perfection they idiotically say has arrived in Montanus and in his prophetesses.”¹⁶⁹

Montanus' response:

“You’re just repeating the worn-out slander that others have said. Why can’t a smart man like you come up with something original, the way Jerome did? We wrote books explaining what the Lord taught us. No one has ever produced one sentence from those books which says such a thing. Paul allowed remarriage in certain situations because God allows it, and

¹⁶⁷ “*Praedestinatus* or *Praedestinatorum Haeresis*, I.26”, The Tertullian Project, Roger Pearce, last modified December 11, 1999, <https://www.tertullian.org/tertullianistae/praedestinatus.htm>.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

so do we. And ‘that which is perfect’ still has not come, but Jesus will come, and we are looking for his return in the clouds. Jesus told some fools in his day, ‘You haven’t known God, but I know Him. And if I say that I don’t know Him, I’ll be a liar like you!’ (Jn. 8:55a). And I will say the same to you. Were I to claim to be ‘that which is perfect’, I would be a liar like you who say that I claim it.”

According to Praedestinatus:

The Mother Church rightly censured Tertullian for defending you and your women.¹⁷⁰

Montanus’ response:

“My women? I did not have any women. Christ has everyone, my friend, including me, Maximilla, Prisca, and you! And we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for what we have done in this life (2Cor. 5:10). And if Tertullian or anyone else followed me as I followed Christ, I am glad of it.”

According to Praedestinatus:

After your doctrine ruined Tertullian, he called us “psychics”. So, whenever the phrase “against the psychics” appears in Tertullian’s writings, he is referring to us Christians and condemning us.¹⁷¹

Montanus’ response:

“By ‘psychics’, Tertullian meant ‘carnally minded’, which you are. Repent, then, and be filled with the Spirit! Become spiritually minded, as those who claim to follow Jesus ought to be.”

Accusation from Vincent of Lerins (fifth century)

Very little is known about Vincent of Lerins, other than he was a monk in Gaul (modern France). It is not even certain that he wrote this work, though it has been attributed to him. In it is the famous saying that the Roman Universal Church taught what had been taught by all God’s servants since the days of Jesus: “In the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.”¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷² Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory*, II.6, eds. Schaff, Philip and Henry Wace, Vol. 11, *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.R. Eerdmans Publishing. Co.), 132.

According to Vincent of Lerins:

“As Origen holds by far the first place among the Greeks, so does Tertullian among the Latins. For who is more learned than he, who is more versed in knowledge whether divine or human? . . . This only I will add, that . . . by asserting the novel furies of Montanus which arose in the Church, and those mad dreams of new doctrine, dreamed by mad women to be true prophecies, he deservedly made both himself and his writings obnoxious.”¹⁷³

Montanus’ response:

“Nothing I taught ‘arose in the Church’ because your Church was invented by Constantine long after I lived. Jesus said that what is highly esteemed by men is an abomination to God (Lk. 16:15); that is your esteemed Roman Universal Church. But the opposite is also true: what is an abomination to men is highly esteemed by God. That ‘abomination to men’ is the truth I taught, which was not new; it is the doctrine that Paul taught and that you Christians do not understand.”

Accusation from John of Damascus (fifth century)

John was an Arab monk and priest of the Roman Church.

According to John of Damascus:

“Cataphrygians, or Montanists, or Ascodrugites . . . make much ado about Montanus and Priscilla.”¹⁷⁴

Montanus’ response:

“They never made half as much ado about me as you Christians do. The one we made much ado about is Jesus, whom you deny with dead ceremonies.”

Accusation from Procopius (c. 500–c. 570)

Procopius was a scholar in the court of the emperor Justinian I and the leading Roman historian of the sixth century.

According to Procopius:

The Phrygians “had treasures of gold and of silver and ornaments set with precious stones, beyond telling or counting, houses and villages in great

¹⁷³ Vincent of Lerins 5th Century, Ancient & Medieval References To Montanism, Daniel R. Jennings, date accessed: February 7, 2024, <http://danielrjennings.org/AncientReferencesToMontanism.html#Vincent>.

¹⁷⁴ John of Damascus, Ancient & Medieval References To Montanism, Daniel R. Jennings, date accessed: February 7, 2024, <http://danielrjennings.org/AncientReferencesToMontanism.html#JohnOfDamascus>.

numbers, and a large amount of land in all parts of the world, and every other form of wealth which exists and has a name among all mankind.”¹⁷⁵

Montanus’ response:

“It is because you lust for such things that you accuse us of having them. Our desire is only to be rich in the Faith and love of Christ. And it is because we left your whitewashed city behind that we now possess those riches, and because of that, we are now also rich in reproach. But we consider ours to be true riches, greater than any that this world affords.”

Accusations from Michael the Great (1126–1199)

Michael the Great, or Michael the Syrian, was a patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

According to Michael the Great:

Montanus and his followers taught that Pepuza was where the New Jerusalem would be located.¹⁷⁶

Montanus’ response:

“Don’t you people ever tire of repeating empty, centuries-old gossip?”

According to Michael the Great:

Montanus and his followers murdered Christians.¹⁷⁷

Montanus’ response:

“We never committed such crimes. On the contrary, you Christians have murdered us with your slander, for when a man’s influence is killed by slander, he is a dead man to those around him. And beyond that, you have put many innocent and godly souls to death who loved Jesus too much to endorse your wickedness.”

According to Michael the Great:

The blessed John of Asia went to Pepuza at the behest of the emperor and found the bodies of Montanus and a few of his followers in “a great reliquary of marble sealed with lead and bound with iron fittings.” Their mouths were covered over with golden leaves.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Procopius, *The Secret History*, XI.16–18.

¹⁷⁶ “The End of Montanism”, Thoughts on Antiquity, Patristics, Information Access, and More, Roger Pearse, July 5, 2010, <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2010/07/05/the-end-of-montanism/>.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Montanus' response:

“I don't know how I was buried; I was dead. But do not believe that myth; nothing that John of Ephesus said can be trusted.”

According to Michael the Great:

“Some people informed the emperor Justinian that Montanus had ordered those responsible for his funeral to bury him fifty cubits under the earth because he said, ‘the fire must reveal me and devour all the face of the earth.’”¹⁷⁹

Montanus' response:

“The only people foolish enough to tell an emperor such nonsense are Christians, but it is hard to believe that even they would have said that, or that an emperor would have believed them.”

Accusation from Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican friar, priest, philosopher, theologian, and an esteemed doctor of the Roman Church.

According to Thomas Aquinas:

Among us, you Cataphrygians “are reputed to have made their Eucharistic bread with infants' blood drawn from tiny punctures over the entire body, and mixed with flour.”¹⁸⁰

Montanus' response:

“Among us, you Christians are reputed to be wolves in sheep's clothing. God will declare, in His time, who is who.”

The Word of Man Versus the Word of God

Men make nothing either true or false by declaring it to be so. The fact that Christians condemned Montanus as a heretic does not mean that Montanus *was* a heretic; it means only that Christians said he was. Jesus warned his followers that people would condemn as evil those who are righteous, but he also made it clear that human condemnation of the righteous does not make them evil in God's sight. On the contrary, he said, “Blessed are you, when people revile and persecute you, and say every evil thing against you falsely, for my sake” (Mt. 5:11; cf. 2Tim. 3:12). So, being falsely called evil for Christ's sake is a testimony *for*

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, “Question 74.1 The matter of this sacrament”. In *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, 1920; online ed., 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4074.htm>.

someone, not against him. That being true, Montanus may be seen as a righteous man, for the Christian hatred and accusations against him, far from disqualifying him from being a man of God, suggest that he was one.

A Lamentable History

One of Jesus' parables was based on the fact that persecution of upright children of God by disobedient children of God is the consistent, lamentable history of God's people (cf. Mt. 21:33–46). Jeremiah was slandered by his fellow Jews, beaten by their leaders, and thrown into prison by order of the king (Jer. 37:15–18). A contemporary of Jeremiah, the prophet Uriah, fled from Jerusalem when he was likewise slandered, but he was pursued by the king's men, captured, and executed (Jer. 26:20–23). Throughout history, at the hands of God's own people as well as the world, righteous men and women have had "trial of mockings and scourgings, and also of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned; they were sawn in half; . . . they were put to death with the sword; they wandered around in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, maltreated . . . , wandering about in desolate places, and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground" (Heb. 11:36–38). The sinless Son of God himself was condemned by his fellow Jews as demon possessed (Jn. 8:48–49), considered mad by his relatives (Mk. 3:21), and cruelly betrayed and turned over to the Romans by Israel's leaders to be executed for speaking the truth (cf. Jn. 18:37).

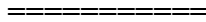
Jesus bluntly warned his followers that it would be no different for them: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, handing you over to synagogues and prisons and haling you before kings and governors because of my name. But it will turn to you for a testimony. . . . You will be betrayed even by parents, and kinsmen, and friends, and associates, and they will kill some of you. And you will be hated by all because of my name" (Lk. 21:12–17). "In fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God" (Jn. 16:1–3). After Jesus' disciples received the Spirit, it did not take long for them to learn how true Jesus' words were. They were thrown into prison and, on orders of the Sanhedrin, flogged for preaching the gospel (Acts 4:1–3; 5:40), and young Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:57–60), and James was beheaded (Acts 12:1–2).

God later sent Paul to the Gentiles, and he won thousands of them to Christ. But it was not long before Paul began to be slandered by those same Gentiles (e.g., 2Cor. 10:10). When his own converts turned on him, we find Paul pleading with those he had led to Christ to believe he was

telling them the truth: “The things I am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying!” (Gal. 1:20). When Paul reached an advanced age, when honor should have been most shown to him for his labors, he was, instead, rejected by them all.¹⁸¹ Likewise, the aged apostle John, and I assume every faithful apostle who was still alive, was slandered and rejected by some believers (e.g., 2Jn. 1:9–10).

Unwise believers in the second century, when Montanus lived, were the spiritual descendants of the unwise believers of the first century. Pursuing a gospel which was contrary to Paul’s, they rejected and persecuted the righteous servants whom God sent to them, thinking they were pleasing God by doing so. But their slander changed nothing, except the minds of those who trusted them.

Unwise believers in the following centuries have been no different. Accusations by Christians of child sacrifice, having multiple wives, and hoarding wealth are not unknown to those whom Jesus has delivered from the religion of Christianity, of whom I am one. The institution of Christianity trains those who join it to reject anything and anybody outside of it and to believe any lie that is told about them. That is institutionalized slander, the most powerful form of slander that exists.¹⁸² No one can escape its clutches without revelation from God.



Remember

- It may well be that the Spirit-filled saints in Phrygia did not call themselves anything, but saw themselves merely as living and worshipping “in spirit and in truth”.
- The first recorded use of the label “Montanist” was by Cyril of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century.
- That Christians condemned Montanus and the others in Phrygia was a testimony against themselves and their religion, not Montanus.
- Neither “Montanists” nor a “Montanist Movement” ever existed.
- Religions of man can be destroyed, but the work of God is eternal.
- Experiences with Jesus and testimonies like that of Montanus were known before Montanus, and such experiences and testimonies have continued since that time.

¹⁸¹ Other than a handful of faithful souls. See Part Five of Book 2 in this Iron Kingdom Series, *The Jerusalem Council*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

¹⁸² Institutionalized slander is explained in Book 1 of this Iron Kingdom Series, *Slander*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

- Nothing can stop God from answering the prayers of His children and pouring out His Spirit upon them.
- Brotherhood in an apostate religion is an abomination.
- There is no safety in numbers from God's righteous judgment.
- The Devil is honored when men worship God in the flesh; God is honored when His people worship Him in spirit and in truth.
- A false accusation is a confession.
- That the truth of Christ divides is undeniable.
- If the truth offend, let it offend.
- There is nothing on earth holy except the Spirit which God sent to earth and the people in whom that Spirit dwells.
- Christian ministers deceive souls with convincing covetousness.
- The only relevant thing for any of us is how we are living now in the sight of God.
- Slander proves nothing.
- Without the sanctifying power of the Spirit, all men are inclined to heresy.
- Carnally minded men cannot rightly judge anything.
- When people's ears are filled with dirt, they cannot hear the word of God.
- Human reasoning is weak and unworthy of consideration when it comes to the things of God.
- No man who knows God is uneducated.
- They are seducers, who offer people empty promises of eternal life in exchange for loyalty to a false religion.
- There is no evil in contending for the truth in the meekness of Christ.
- In a Christian culture, God's true servants are like sheep in wolves' clothing.
- At birth, all men are estranged from the truth, and we all remain estranged from it until we surrender to Christ, who alone leads men out of darkness and into truth.
- False religion is religion without the power and truth of God's Spirit.
- God is not taken in by flattery.
- Man glorifies Christ only as he yields himself as a living sacrifice to God.
- It is contrary to the gospel to venerate anything or any place on this cursed earth.
- Jesus despises the cross, and so does his Father. The cross that Christ bore was spiritual; it was to do the will of the Father, which for Jesus included being nailed to the hateful Roman cross.

- Men must receive the Spirit, not necessarily the gifts of it.
- The sound made by God's Spirit when it enters into someone is made so that all may know who has received the Spirit and who has not.
- God's damnation is the only irrevocable sentence, and His condemnation alone is to be feared.
- When the Spirit speaks through God's servants, the words do not come from their minds.
- Saints of old earned through righteousness and suffering the sarcastic title "Christian".
- That which is highly esteemed by men is an abomination to God, and that which is an abomination to men is highly esteemed by God.
- When a man's influence is killed by slander, he is a dead man to those around him.
- Man can make nothing either true or false by declaring it to be so.
- Human condemnation of the upright does not make them evil in God's sight.
- Christianity trains those who join it to reject anything and anybody outside of it.
- Institutionalized slander is the most powerful form of slander, and no one can escape it without revelation from God.

Chapter Four

AD 180: The Turning Point

SECTION 1: The Miraculous Was the Norm

Montanus Was at First Accepted

Early in the second century, by all accounts, miracles and prophecy were still taking place among believers. Before Montanus, a believer named Quadratus was “renowned along with the daughters of Philip for his prophetic gifts.”¹⁸³ Quadratus is said to have presented an “apology”, that is, a defense of the Faith, before the Roman emperor Hadrian, in which he confessed the reality and, by implication, the continuation of the miracle-working power of God.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Eusebius says that it is precisely because prophecy and miracles were commonplace among believers that so many of them believed Montanus.¹⁸⁵ Montanus’ ministry, then, if judged according to what was normative for saints of his time “was not new and heretical, even though later it was consistently treated as such.”¹⁸⁶

It was concerning prophecy in the second century that Justin Martyr admonished believers that “when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken, as it were, personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them.”¹⁸⁷ Obviously, Justin considered it normative for believers to hear such prophecies, for he was counseling believers on how to understand the prophets.

¹⁸³ Eusebius, *Church History*, III.xxxvii.1.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., IV.iii.1–2. If this happened in Hadrian’s time, those who testified were very old indeed.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., V.iii.4. Here, Eusebius mentioned two men besides Montanus as leaders of the saints in Phrygia: Alcibiades and Theodotus.

¹⁸⁶ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 117.

¹⁸⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXXVI, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 175.

The second-century bishop Irenaeus, also a contemporary of Montanus and considered a father of the Church, defended Montanus. “Indeed, in writing against heresies, he criticized *those who were against Montanus*^d for opposing both the gospel and the prophetic Spirit, and he argued that [by opposing them,] they were driving prophetic grace out of the *community of faith*^b.”¹⁸⁸ This echoes the Lord’s plea through the prophetess Maximilla, when the Spirit cried out, “I am chased like a wolf from the sheep!”¹⁸⁹ And it also echoes her warning: “After me, there will no longer be a prophet, but the end.”¹⁹⁰

Additionally, when Montanus became known in Rome, the bishop there¹⁹¹ did not condemn him. On the contrary, he extended to Montanus and the congregations in Phrygia a letter of peace, acknowledging the legitimacy of their experience.¹⁹² That is not surprising, since believers everywhere acknowledged the fact that spiritual power and gifts were a material part of the gospel. But later, it was a different story. Tertullian said that the bishop was persuaded to turn against the Spirit-filled believers in Phrygia by an Apostate named Praxeas, under whose influence the bishop began to undo measures he had previously taken to encourage them.¹⁹³

It is also worth noting that Tertullian himself suffered no persecution from fellow Christians when he entered into the Spirit-filled life.¹⁹⁴ He was not condemned by the bishops where he lived and continued to be a

¹⁸⁸ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 136.

¹⁸⁹ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, II, 7:336.

¹⁹⁰ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.2.4.

¹⁹¹ The name of this bishop is unknown.

¹⁹² Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, I, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian; I. Apologetic, II. Anti-Marcion, III. Ethical, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published by Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 597.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Tertullian’s extreme views are often thought to reflect those of Montanus, but that is doubtful. Tertullian’s harsh doctrine concerning second marriages, for example, is altogether wrongheaded, and there is nothing from Montanus which suggests that Tertullian’s view was his. It is as Christine Trevett said (*Montanism*, 2): “[Tertullian’s] views should always be suspected of being less than truly representative” of Montanus. Tabbernee (*Prophets and Gravestones*, 3) also cautioned that “care must be taken not to divide Tertullian artificially into a pre-Montanist and a Montanist. Much of what Tertullian believed in and practiced before 208 C.E. he believed and practiced after that year.” This is wise counsel. Tertullian’s continued extremist views after his introduction to the Spirit-filled life may have led him to repeat some prophetic utterances of Montanus and others in a way which supported his own views rather than what the Spirit intended.

widely read theologian, though he had refused “to adjust his faith to the demands of the time” and spent the rest of his life fearlessly attacking his former fellow Apostates for what he considered their laxity in spiritual matters “and the evolution of new practices.”¹⁹⁵ God satisfies those who receive the Spirit which Montanus and others preached, Tertullian said, by illuminating the Scriptures for them so that they are able to teach the truth with none of the “heretical subtleties” of Christians.¹⁹⁶ A right understanding of the Scriptures, he went on to say, comes only by the Spirit, “which descends in copious streams from the Paraclete. If you will only draw water from his fountains, you will never thirst for other doctrine.”¹⁹⁷

Cyprian, a third-century bishop of Carthage, martyr, and Catholic saint, reportedly “was accustomed never to pass a day without reading Tertullian, and that he frequently said to [his secretary], ‘Give me the master,’ meaning by this, Tertullian.”¹⁹⁸ Only after hatred of Montanus became the prescriptive attitude for Christians did that admiration change, and in the late fifth century, Pope Gelasius had Tertullian’s works listed among the writings “not to be received”.¹⁹⁹ All seven of the books Tertullian wrote defending ecstatic prophecy have been lost, possibly destroyed by devout Churchmen.²⁰⁰

Ecstatic Expressions

The prophesying of some believers heard by a mid-second century pagan named Celsus indicates how Montanus might have prophesied. Celsus was a philosopher and hard-core opponent of the gospel, and he gave this sarcastic, firsthand account of what he had seen and heard from traveling prophets:

¹⁹⁵ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 147. Cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1993. First published 1967 by Pelican Books), 52–53.

¹⁹⁶ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection on the Flesh*, LXIII.9, 597. Tertullian’s specific topic here was the resurrection, but he would have applied this truth to a revelation from the Spirit on any topic.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, LIII, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 3, *Jerome: Lives of Illustrious Men, A Select Library of the Christian and Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892), 373.

¹⁹⁹ Pope Gelasius, “Likewise a list of Apocryphal Books”, V, *The Decretum Gelasianum de Libris Recipiendis et non Recipiendis*, trans. Robert Pearse, https://www.tertullian.org/decretum_eng.htm.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, 147.

There are some who wander about begging and roaming around cities and military camps; and they pretend to be moved as if giving some oracular utterance. It is an ordinary and common custom for each one to say, "I am God (or a son of God, or a divine Spirit), and I have come. Already the world is being destroyed, and you, O men, are to perish because of your iniquities. But I wish to save you. And you shall see me returning again with heavenly power. Blessed is he who has worshipped me now! But I will cast everlasting fire upon all the rest, both on cities and on country places. And men who fail to realize the penalties in store for them will in vain repent and groan. But I will preserve for ever those who have been convinced by me."

Having brandished these threats, they then go on to add incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances [speaking in tongues?], the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover; for they are meaningless and nonsensical, and they give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes.²⁰¹

Most likely, at least some of those itinerant prophets were truly sent by God to win souls to Christ, and they no doubt did. To give mankind such vibrant, convicting spiritual life was the Son of God's purpose for coming to earth (Jn. 10:10). But that life is never welcomed by men like Celsus (and the apostate believers he hated), who prefer a government-approved, organized religion. Paul and Montanus would both respond by saying that men cannot organize the religion of Christ; his religion is already organized. God sent the Spirit to organize men, not vice versa.

Imitators, at First

When in about 200, the philosopher and theologian Clement of Alexandria said that false prophets "prophesied in ecstasy,"²⁰² he meant that they did so in imitation of true prophets. Clement was not saying that the distinguishing mark of false prophets is that they prophesy in ecstasy. He knew that false prophets win disciples by imitating true ones. The

²⁰¹ Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 402–403.

²⁰² Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, I.xvii, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, of *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published by Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 319.

next statement Clement made was that false prophets also imitate true ones by telling some truth,²⁰³ his entire point being that false prophets imitate true ones by copying some of what true prophets say and by prophesying *the way* they prophesy. In Clement's time, that was a fact of spiritual life.

However, that changed. Although among the earliest believers, being possessed by the Spirit of God was at the heart of the Faith, and "true prophets were men and women who *could be observed* [emphasis mine] to surrender all personal initiative,"²⁰⁴ Christian leaders made that way of prophesying seem old-fashioned so that people would believe that the man who spoke for Christ was the man "who kept his wits about him and built up a private practice."²⁰⁵ Far from imitating the prophets of old, it became necessary in order to enjoy a successful career as a Christian minister to be a polished speaker, one who resolutely "keeps his wits about him". And it remains so to this day. Such men are trained to say much, and to say it well, but nothing anyone says, regardless of how well it is said, can accomplish the righteousness of God if it does not come by revelation from Jesus.

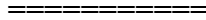
Paul's experience is God's standard for true ministry: "I would have you to know, brothers, regarding the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from a man, nor was I taught it, but I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12). That is why Paul asked the rhetorical question, "How shall they preach except they be sent [by God]?" (Rom. 10:15a). And Peter agreed: "If any man speak, let it be as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things, God might be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1Pet. 4:11). If the source of a man's message is himself or another man rather than a revelation from Jesus, he is deceiving himself as well as those who trust him (cf. 2Tim. 3:13). God condemned such ministers in ancient Israel: "I did not send them, nor did I give them commandment, nor have I spoken to them. They prophesy to you a vision of lies, and divination, and worthlessness, and deceitfulness out of their own hearts!" (Jer. 14:14b). That is what Christians were doing in the second century, and that is the apostasy Montanus saw all around him. Believers in the first century fell away from the grace of Christ (cf. Gal.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 67.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

5:4; 2Tim. 1:15; 4:10–11), and nothing had changed by the time the second century rolled around. Nor has it yet changed.²⁰⁶



Remember

- Men cannot organize the religion of Christ; his religion is already organized. God sent the Spirit to organize men, not vice versa.
- False teachers win disciples by imitating true ones.
- Nothing anyone says can accomplish the righteousness of God if it does not come by revelation from Jesus.
- Believers in the first century fell away from the grace of Christ, and nothing had changed by the time the second century rolled around. Nor has it yet changed.

SECTION 2: AD 180

“Not in the Ordinary Sense”

Just as something tragic took place among first-century believers when they rejected Paul, so something tragic took place among second-century believers when they rejected Montanus. That “something” was the same in both cases, namely, a lessening of the charismatic character of the body of Christ, corresponding with “an increasing turn toward a structured episcopate.”²⁰⁷ In the days of the apostles, the community of faith was distinguished by the power and gifts of the Spirit, but prophecies by persons moved by the Spirit and other such manifestations all but “ceased in the course of the second century and to some extent as early as its first half,”²⁰⁸ for Christian leaders redefined heresy in order to marginalize charismatic service of God, if not to exclude it altogether. The editor of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* explained the role that Montanus played in that tragic development:

The faith of Montanus^e must not be looked upon as a heresy in the ordinary sense of the word. . . . Although it failed and passed

²⁰⁶ For more on the general apostasy among first-century believers, see Part Five of Book 2 in this Iron Kingdom Series, *The Jerusalem Council*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

²⁰⁷ Arland J. Hultgren and Steven A. Haggmark, eds., *The Earliest Christian Heretics: Readings from Their Opponents* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 127.

²⁰⁸ Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan from the third German edition, Vol. 1 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), 333.

away, *that faith*^e had a marked influence on the development of the *Christian religion*^b. In the first place, it aroused a general distrust of prophecy, and the result was that *Christians*^b soon came to the conviction that prophecy had entirely ceased. . . . [Also because of Montanus,] *Christians*^b had to²⁰⁹ lay increased stress upon the organization. . . . and the line began to be sharply drawn between the age of the apostles, in which there had been direct supernatural revelations, and the later age, in which such revelations had disappeared. We are, undoubtedly, to date from this time [late second century] that exalted conception of the glory of the apostolic age, and of its absolute separation from all subsequent ages, which marks so strongly the Church of succeeding centuries. [In other words, the apostolic age is so exalted that it is unattainable for following generations.] . . . [Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla] were quite orthodox . . . and did not pretend to alter in any way the revelation given by Christ and his apostles.²¹⁰

But if the faith of Montanus and those with him was not “a heresy in the ordinary sense of the word,” then in what sense was it heresy? Why not consider the possibility that the heretics were those who rejected Montanus and invented standards for judging the veracity of prophets which God never instituted? As the reader has seen, a principal criticism of Christians against Montanus and his fellows was the *way* they prophesied. But there is no style of prophesying forbidden in Scripture; God’s prophets have prophesied in many different ways. What determines the legitimacy of a prophet is only whether or not God has sent him, not his style, or when or where he speaks.

A Christian Culture

Graydon Snyder proposed 180 as “the date at which the Christian subculture was willing to say to the majority culture that it existed and had a right to exist”²¹¹ and that a distinctively Christian culture “became visible”.²¹² Those who called themselves Christians had now drifted far enough from the life of the Spirit to begin feeling they were part of the

²⁰⁹ This is false. Christians did not have to continue in their error. Through Montanus and others, Christ was offering them a choice to turn from it to the life of the Spirit.

²¹⁰ Eusebius, *Church History* V.xvi.1, 229n1.

²¹¹ Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003. First published in 1985), 297.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 295.

world order and, so, to begin demanding their rights in it. The earliest believers, by contrast, were supremely disinterested in fitting in with wicked men; their purpose in life was to please God in this world and secure their place in the next one. They had been taught by Christ's apostles to "keep your minds on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2), "for we do not have here an enduring city; rather, we seek the one that is coming" (Heb. 13:14). But that thrilling message of hope was now being subordinated to proper performance of rituals and philosophical justifications of a faith gone awry.

Things Pagans Understood: Rituals

In 180, it had been about a century since the first apostles were available to guide believers in holiness, but now, "the cumulative effect of the decisions made by Christian leaders was to bring *their faith*^b into the world and to multiply its numbers until it could win the world to Christian allegiance."²¹³ And so, from about 180 to 313, Christians "gave to the Mediterranean world a religious alternative of considerable depth—an alternative expressed in activities [rituals] and symbols that were readily understood by the Roman culture."²¹⁴ It is not by chance that there was during that same time an increase in pagan conversions to the Christian Movement.²¹⁵ Christians' skillful use of elements of pagan culture, such as presenting philosophic defenses of their faith, paved the way for Pagans to participate in their religion, which religion actually grew "powerful and respectable long before it acquired an imperial champion [i.e., Constantine]."²¹⁶ But the increase in numbers did not equate to "the increase of God" which Paul wanted for believers (Col. 2:19).

The use of rituals played an essential role in Christians becoming visible to pagan culture. For that reason especially, Harnack agreed with the 180 date: "Although traces of it are found at an earlier period in some of the older Fathers, such as Ignatius," he wrote, "ritualism did not begin to be a power *among believers*^b till the end of the second century."²¹⁷ That is true. Believers added ritualism to their worship in the first century, but they fully gave themselves to it in the second. The very reason that first-century believers rejected Paul's gospel is that it did not include the rituals

²¹³ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 143.

²¹⁴ Snyder, *Evidence of Church Life*, 295, 297.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 191.

²¹⁷ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 334.

of Moses' law, and they had been persuaded of the need to perform them (cf. Gal. 4:21). However, by the early second century, when believers emerged from a decades-long void of historical records for them, they had, for unknown reasons, abandoned the law's rituals and begun developing rituals of their own. Then came Montanus, echoing the reproofs of Paul.

While Christians and Pagans remained societal enemies in the second century, "on a different plateau, a meeting of the minds began to occur."²¹⁸ Spiritually, they were becoming more alike. Robert Grant said that for believers of that time to survive in this world, "a certain measure of adjustment or even compromise was inevitable."²¹⁹ However, that is true only of the faith of apostate believers, for their new religion was no more of God than was pagan religion. As the saying goes, like attracts like, and once the Apostates began to compromise with the world, neither could resist the other's influence. The first-century believers' adoption of Moses' law made them Apostates, and then, their second-century invention of ceremonial forms and doctrines led to what they eventually became: Roman Christians. With the first-century believers' rejection of Paul's gospel, despite their claims to the contrary, they had rejected Christ as well (cf. Lk. 10:16), and so it was with believers' second-century rejection of Montanus.

When believers began to drift away from dependence on the power of the Spirit, it really did not matter what it was that they drifted toward, whether Moses' law, as in the first century, or new ideas and pagan culture, as in the second. Whatever it was, it was going to be wrong. In this covenant, reliance upon anything for salvation other than the power of God is misguided and vain.

Things Pagans Understood: Philosophy

Christians' embrace of philosophy also played an essential role in their becoming visible and acceptable to pagan culture. It is true that the emergence of a distinctive Christian culture in the second century made Pagans aware of Christians as never before, and their dislike of them "found expression in savage attacks and sarcastic remarks."²²⁰ However, Christian philosophers such as Justin Martyr led the way in offering reasoned defenses of the Christian Movement to Roman officials in an

²¹⁸ Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, 158.

²¹⁹ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 247.

²²⁰ Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, 158.

attempt to stop the persecutions believers were suffering. Pagan philosophers such as Celsus responded, and their equally reasoned arguments “prompted educated Christians to redefine their position and arguments.”²²¹ By this means, philosophy found its way into the developing Christian religion as a tool for self-defense, by which means “a new era for Christian theology had started, and Christians began to see themselves in a new light.”²²² But the “new light” was in fact a deeper darkness, for the Christians had been seduced into philosophical debate with sinners, hoping to win the debate instead of simply being living testimonies of the saving grace of God and letting that be their victory.

Rather than repent at Montanus’ preaching and return to worship sanctified by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 15:16), Christians stubbornly continued in their apostasy, and their goal became to make their religion “culturally and ideologically palatable to the world.”²²³ The enthusiastic manner of Montanus and his fellows, as normal as it had been in the charismatic past, was not useful to Christians in their efforts “to make their religion philosophically and culturally more acceptable for the ‘outsiders.’”²²⁴ Paul saw it coming (cf. 1Tim. 4:1–3), and I believe that Montanus saw that it had come, and just as God gave it to Paul to warn the saints that it *would* happen, I believe that God gave it to Montanus to warn them that it *had* happened.

From the Christians’ point of view, the Spirit “had outlived his primitive function”; and though it “was too deeply entrenched in the New Testament to be demoted,” it “ceased in practice to play any audible part in the counsels of *believers*^b. The old tradition of the inspired prophet who spoke what came to him was replaced by the more convenient idea of a continuous divine guidance which was granted [only] to the principal *Christian*^b dignitaries.”²²⁵ Under that system, the Spirit of God was relegated to a role subservient to Christian bishops, and if anyone ever questioned that arrangement, the answer was simply to say that the bishop is led by the Spirit and, so, the congregant need not bother with knowing God for himself. In truth, however, the Spirit plays second fiddle to nobody in the education of God’s children, and it departed from the Christian bishops who claimed to be the sole interpreters of Scripture. The tragedy is that, like Sampson of old, they did not even realize that

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Trevett, *Montanism*, 30.

²²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²²⁵ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 67.

God had departed from them, and they hated Montanus with a passion for saying publicly that He had.

Naked Truth

Nothing can alter the eternal gospel of Christ. When men add to it or deduct from it, it vanishes, and something else immediately stands in its place. Paul made this point when writing to his beloved Galatians after they began to follow false teachers: “I marvel that you are turning away so quickly from Him who called you by the grace of Christ to another gospel, *which is not another* [emphasis mine], but there are certain men who trouble you, determined to alter the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6–7). There is only one gospel from God, and it is eternally the same. It cannot be improved upon and marketed. It is naked truth, and whenever men attempt to adorn it to make it presentable to the world, as the Galatians were doing, it becomes something foreign to Christ. The beauty of the gospel is that it never needs adorning, for it has no “uncomely parts” which must be covered over with sophisticated explanations and symbols. The gospel of Christ endures, forever unsullied by anything of earth, and it waits patiently, unmoved, available for discovery by any sincere heart in any age who longs to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

As much liberty as God’s children have in nonessential matters, His doctrines are immutable. Paul would not have told Timothy that the saints in Asia had forsaken the truth (2Tim. 1:15) if they had only changed jobs. He encouraged believers to feel free even to dine with their pagan friends if they were so disposed (1Cor. 10:27), but he would not accept any of them forsaking the seven pillars of the Faith that he listed in Ephesians 4:4–6: “There is ONE BODY, and ONE SPIRIT, even as you were called to the ONE HOPE of your calling; ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM, ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.” Beyond these seven essentials, Paul had but one rule: “Live in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2).

Rewriting History

Eusebius was rewriting history when he declared in the fourth century that “from the middle of the second century onward, Christianity was universally recognized as a sober and respectable philosophy against

which no one dared to revive the ancient calumnies.”²²⁶ First, Eusebius was promoting the idea that Christianity existed in the second century. It did not. Christianity was produced by the Synthesis in the fourth century. Secondly, if Eusebius’ religion had been “universally recognized as a respectable philosophy” in the second century, then the persecutions of that century, and the horrific persecutions of the third and early fourth, would never have taken place. In reality, regardless of the ever-greater efforts of Christians to accommodate the world and gain acceptance, “the leaders of the state were not convinced.”²²⁷

Pagan society as a whole was not convinced, either. “The Syrian satirist Lucian [c. 125–after 180] scoffed at believers for believing in ‘that crucified sophist’ [Jesus] without rational demonstration, including his command that they all be brothers and share everything. As a result, any sharp operator can quickly make himself rich from them.”²²⁸ And as we have seen, Celsus’ caustic writings against believers gave proof of a personal acquaintance with the doctrines and manners of believers, some of which we recognize as true, while others are clearly those of Christians. Celsus, however, made no such distinction; he ridiculed all who believed in Jesus. The entire purpose of his lost book was to demonstrate what he considered to be the foolishness of the gospel and of anyone who believed it. So much for Eusebius’ “universal recognition” of the gospel “as a sober and respectable philosophy”.

The universal recognition for which second- and third-century Christians yearned, and which Eusebius falsely claimed for them, came about only when Constantine established the Roman Universal Church, and especially some sixty years later when Theodosius outlawed all other religions within the borders of the empire. Far from the world admiring believers in the second century, “the end of the second century was a period of serious clashes between paganism and *believers*.”^a

There was not even a “universal recognition” of authority among Christians themselves. The process of developing a new style of ceremonial worship did not go smoothly for them. Between the end of the apostolic period, when the process began, and AD 325, when the Synthesis was realized, Christians disagreed on almost everything. By the fourth century, some of those disputes had grown so great that they would

²²⁶ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 134. Cf. Eusebius, *Church History*, IV.vii.13–14. For Eusebius calling Christianity a philosophy, e.g., *Church History*, II.xiii.6; II.xxxvii.2.

²²⁷ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 102.

²²⁸ Ian Hazlett, ed., *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 234–235.

never have been resolved had not Rome transformed itself into a Christian Empire.²²⁹ With that, “Constantine became directly involved in the affairs of the church, thereby setting the stage for the amalgamation of the powers of the church and state.”²³⁰ From that point, the decisions of the Christian leaders who colluded with Constantine were enforced by law, and where persuasion or intimidation failed, severer measures were taken, such as the confiscation of property, banishment, and even execution. From its earliest days, Rome had never tolerated resistance to its authority, and it was no different when it became a Christian empire.

But it was tit for tat. The empire embraced its favored Christians, and its favored Christians embraced the empire. As long as the empire was persecuting them, Christians opposed violence. Said the second-century Christian apologist, Athenagoras, “We cannot endure even to see a man put to death.”²³¹ And in the early third century, a man could be rejected by the Christian community if he participated in regular military service:

A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected. A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If a catechumen or a believer seeks to become a soldier, they must be rejected, for they have despised God.²³²

But after Constantine, and especially from the end of the fourth century when Theodosius made Christianity the official State religion, Christians began formulating doctrines to justify violence, where needed, to force submission to the Roman Universal Church. Augustine was one of them: “Though saying it was ‘better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment,’ [he added] . . . that the latter method must not be neglected.”²³³ Said Augustine,

²²⁹ For one example, Christians were deeply divided over how to deal with believers who had forsaken the faith during persecution, but afterward wanted to return. This became known as the Donatist controversy.

²³⁰ Eddie L. Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), 33–34.

²³¹ Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians*, XXXV, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire), Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published by Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 147.

²³² Burton Scott Easton, trans., *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 42.

²³³ Walter Woodburn Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008. First published 1946 by University of Pennsylvania Press), 198.

Why should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return...? [They will be] received by their loving mother [the Church] with more affection if they are recalled to her bosom through the enforcement of terrible but salutary laws. . . . Is it not a part of the care of the shepherd, when any sheep have left the flock, to bring them back to the fold . . . by the fear or even the pain of the whip, if they show symptoms of resistance? . . . The Lord Himself bids the guests in the first instance to be invited to His great supper, and afterwards compelled.²³⁴

Pope Leo the Great (440–461) “accepted as a duty the suppression of heresy and raised no objection to legislation which treated heresy as a crime against civil society, and declared it punishable with death.”²³⁵ But merely killing heretics was not enough for Pope Innocent III (1161–1216). His rule, “for the first time, identified heresy with the doctrine of treason as found in Roman law,”²³⁶ making heresy, as the Roman Church defined it, “the worst of all crimes,”²³⁷ worthy of the cruelest forms of punishment. This utterly carnal mindset led to a multitude of enormities, such as the Crusades and the horrific Inquisition of the Middle Ages, but those enormities were only a continuation of the ancient Roman tradition of merciless brutality against any who resisted its dominion.

Enforced Uniformity

The original body of Christ would have refused any connection with men’s ways, for they wanted “no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). But fellowship with darkness was key to the political success of Christians. Without fellowship in spiritual darkness, the Synthesis of Rome and apostate believers would not have been possible. Both were without the true gospel even before the Synthesis took place. And afterwards, the empire, then under Christian management, compelled everyone under its control to live within its imposing, whitewashed walls, that is, to submit to the Roman Church and to bear the name Christian. Nevertheless, through the centuries, pure and sincere souls, thinking to do God service by bearing that name, were filled with the

²³⁴ Augustine, *Correction of the Donatists*, II.vi.23–24, 642.

²³⁵ Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity*, 198.

²³⁶ Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 48.

²³⁷ Brian A. Pavlac, *Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition through the Salem Witch Trials* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 70.

Spirit, frequently to the hot displeasure of their Christian leaders. And many paid the ultimate price for doing so. Ramsay MacMullen pointed out that after the Synthesis took place, “more Christians died for their faith at the hands of fellow Christians than had died before in all the persecutions [of pagan emperors].”²³⁸ And as Desmond O’Grady put it, “After Constantine, Christians had only themselves to fear.”²³⁹

For well over a thousand years after the Synthesis, the Roman genius enforced uniformity by compelling submission to orthodoxy, as defined by Christians, which caused untold misery throughout the many kingdoms under Christian control. Among the sufferers were many nameless souls like Montanus, who dared to obey God’s call to follow Jesus the way believers are exhorted to do: “Jesus, so that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate. So then, let us go to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:12–13).

The Rise of a Christian Clergy

In the Faith of Christ, the ability to minister is created within a man by God through the Spirit, but that method was abandoned by Christians, and the ministry became an office granted by ecclesiastical officials by means of an ordination ceremony. Paul said of himself and his co-workers, “We are not competent in ourselves to determine anything by ourselves; on the contrary, our sufficiency is of God, who has made us capable ministers of a new covenant, not of letter [the Scriptures] but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2Cor. 3:5–6). And as noted earlier, Peter said, “If any man speak, let it be as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let it be with the strength that God supplies” (1Pet. 4:11a). If a man is made a minister by any other means, God is not glorified, for only what comes through the Spirit of Christ glorifies God.

Clergymen with high-sounding titles granted to them by other Christian clergymen may give them an appearance of being ministers of Christ, but with every ritual they perform, they deny that Christ purchased with his blood an entirely new kind of religion: a religion of the Spirit. That denial of Christ began among believers in the first century, and Paul said of such apostate souls, “They profess to know God, but by works [rituals], they deny Him” (Tit. 1:16a). Likewise, Peter prophesied of the rise of many teachers among the saints who would teach doctrines that

²³⁸ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 14.

²³⁹ Desmond O’Grady, *The Victory of the Cross: A History of the Early Church in Rome* (London: Harper Collins Religious, 1992), 179.

would “deny the Lord who bought them” (2Pet. 2:1). And by Montanus’ time, they had come, proposing for believers “a distinct priesthood parallel to that of the Old Testament.”²⁴⁰ According to the hierarchy of Christian ministers laid out by Clement of Rome (Pope Clement I), the clergy even included a subgroup of ministers called Levites!²⁴¹ And after the Synthesis, many other Roman Church offices, all of them foreign to Christ, were added, such as cardinals, monsignors, prelates, abbots, legates, friars, monks, nuns, and many more.

In dismissing the Spirit’s work as “Montanism”, Christians were clearing the way for the ascendancy of their own clergy, and thus expediting the demise of spiritual power among believers, as Maximilla had foretold: “After me, there will no longer be a prophet, but the end.” Within a generation after her death, Christian leaders themselves were forced to admit that miraculous works of the Spirit had greatly diminished, yet they continued confidently in their offices. The power and liberty of the Spirit was replaced by ceremonial form, and many volunteered to be trained as performers in that lifeless and, for the highest ranking officials, lucrative religion. Rome’s elevation of Christians in 325 to the heights of worldly power and wealth was a final nail in the coffin of spiritual liberty, and the truth itself was outlawed.

The rise of a Christian clergy was both a cause and a result of the decline of reliance upon the Spirit. The less of the Spirit believers had, the more they looked to men without the Spirit to lead them, and the more they looked to men without the Spirit to lead them, the less of the Spirit they had. It was a terrible, twisted descent into the pit. The truth and power of God were seen as a threat by Christian clergymen instead of as an inspiration for their ministry, and anyone like Montanus had to be crushed if the nascent Christian Movement was to survive. So, emboldened by growing numbers, Christian leaders

did everything they could to stop any movement of the Spirit of God in their services. They did not want anyone standing up and saying: “Thus saith the Lord,” and thereby defy their absolute authority over *believers*^b, as Montanus and his followers had done.

²⁴⁰ Hyatt, *Charismatic Christianity*, 30.

²⁴¹ Clement, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 40:5, Canon III, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, of Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885). The Roman Church’s tradition of Levites being part of the ministry continued at least into the fifth century. Cf. *The Code of Canons of the African Church* (AD 419), 16.

After all, when Ignatius or any other *Christian*²⁴² bishop claimed that their authority . . . is the same as God's authority . . . , they certainly did not want God or anyone whom God was using to contradict anything they said or taught. . . . What did they do to stop it? The first thing they did was to forbid it by claiming it was of the devil! The second thing they did was to take away the liberty and joy of spontaneous emotional worship and replace it with the ritual and ceremony of the Mass!²⁴³

The classicist E. R. Dodds believed that the Christian victory over Montanus was foreshadowed by Ignatius' famous claim that the Spirit had said to him: "Do nothing without the Bishop." Apostate ministers embraced that doctrine, of course, for it made them appear to be indispensable to believers, essential to their hope of eternal life.

There is an element of truth, however, in Dodds' contention that the defeat of Montanus was inevitable. For when believers rejected Paul, they could go nowhere but down, spiritually, and they could do nothing but reject anyone like Paul, such as Montanus. But the "defeat" of Montanus was actually just more evidence that apostate believers had themselves been defeated by the world and were the spiritual heirs not of Christ but of the Apostates of the first century. Montanus himself was no more defeated than was Paul, though he and his message were rejected.

Government by Bishops

The Christian leaders' craving for absolute authority over believers took time to achieve, for the Spirit which keeps believers free still operated, though at an ever-lessening degree, among them for centuries after the apostles. In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr boasted to a Jew that "the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time, and hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us."²⁴⁴ At about the same time, Irenaeus testified that among believers were prophetic gifts, speaking in tongues,

²⁴² The author's word here is "Catholic", which is anachronistic and misleading. The Catholic Church did not exist at Ignatius' time.

²⁴³ Harry A. Peyton, "Second Century Glossolalia", chap. 2 in *A Historical Record of Speaking in Tongues Glossolalia*, <https://19acts.tumblr.com/post/125954670797/historical-record-speaking-tongues-harry-peyton-doctrine>.

²⁴⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, LXXXII, 1:240.

and revelations,²⁴⁵ and “frequently” the miracle of the dead raised to life.²⁴⁶ But within the Christian ranks was a determined resistance to the light and liberty of the Spirit. Eddie Hyatt wrote,

History demonstrates that the institutional trend advocated by Ignatius [“Do nothing without the Bishop”] continued, culminating in the ecclesiasticism of the medieval Roman Catholic Church and in its monarchical bishop. This meant that outward ecclesiastical forms of both office and ritual came to be valued over personal, spiritual experiences. It also meant that spontaneous manifestations of the Holy Spirit became less and less desirable, especially by those in authority. It is for this reason that [theologian James] Ash, in answer to the popular notion that the charismatic gifts were replaced by the New Testament Canon, declares, “The bishops, not the Canon, expelled prophecy.”²⁴⁷

That is true; Christian bishops, not the Scriptures, marginalized those filled with the Spirit, and in time, it became normative for Christians everywhere to do the same. Still, in spite of the centuries-long effort of Christian leaders to snuff out the life of the Spirit, even after Rome’s power was placed in their hands, the Spirit was never completely quenched. God is too faithful for that, for hungry souls may always find His grace, even if they do not fully understand Paul’s gospel. We are saved by grace through faith, not by knowledge.

Decades after the Synthesis, some Christians, such as Hilary (c. 310–c. 367), bishop of Poitiers, were apparently still enjoying spiritual power and gifts. He wrote,

The gift of the Spirit is manifest where wisdom makes utterance and the words of life are heard, and where there is the knowledge that comes of God-given insight; or by faith in God; or by the gift of healings; or by the working of miracles; or by prophecy; or by discerning of spirits; or by kinds of tongues, that the speaking in

²⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.vi.1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Philip Schaff, Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, of Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 531.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II.xxxi.2.

²⁴⁷ Hyatt, *Charismatic Christianity*, 26.

tongues may be bestowed as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit; or by the interpretation of tongues.²⁴⁸

Christians invented a number of myths about Hilary performing miracles, but the above statement indicates that he was one who possessed gifts of the Spirit. And his thankful praise for those gifts while being a highly regarded Christian is more evidence that the exercise of spiritual gifts could not have been the reason Montanus was condemned. The critical difference is that Hilary never saw the error of the Christians' new religion and exercised his gifts while remaining in it, while Montanus saw the error and stayed out of it.

Of course, the bishops could not have imposed limits on the operation of the gifts of the Spirit if believers had refused to accept those limits and remained faithful to Christ, and they could have done so, for the liberty to operate freely in the Spirit is of God, who is not governed by men. Paul exhorted believers to stay filled with the Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:18), and the only alternative to that is to quench the Spirit, which our heavenly Father absolutely forbids (cf. 1Thess. 5:19). Yet, Christian bishops demanded to be respected as judges of who spoke for Christ and who did not. And when believers looked to them for that purpose, it was a death trap, for the bishops did not emphasize the need of the Spirit as Paul did. Instead, they emphasized the need to observe proper ceremonial form, and that required worshippers to quench the Spirit.

In 1Corinthians 12, Paul acknowledged that one of the gifts God had given His saints was the gift of government, but it was not government in a worldly sense; it was government in the sense of guiding the faith of God's children. God's kind of government among His people leaves no room for what officials of the Roman Universal Church did to untold thousands over the centuries who would not submit to them. Paul said that God gave him His power "for edification and not for destruction" (2Cor. 10:8),²⁴⁹ but Christians used the power Rome gave them to destroy many an innocent life.

So, then, it was not only the Christians' adoption of the ceremonial way of worship with which Romans were familiar that led to the formation of Christianity; it was also their drift into a worldly way of

²⁴⁸ Hilary, *On the Trinity*, VIII.30 (excerpts), eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 9, *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus. of A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 146.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Hans Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power: In the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1977), 65.

governance. Christian clergymen gradually became “less representatives of a triumphant and intransigent faith than negotiators . . . of a working compromise between the new faith and traditional ways of dealing with the supernatural world.”²⁵⁰

According to the Christian Clergy

Montanus wanted to restore to believers the lost beauty of holiness, but Christians reacted to him by stiffening their resolve to forge their own religion. The chief effect of Montanus’ ministry on Christians was not good but bad in that it motivated them to devise a doctrine which held that revelation came to an end with the apostolic age.²⁵¹ And as that conviction solidified in their minds, they came to view their leaders’ interpretation of Scripture as the only legitimate source of understanding, and the Spirit no longer was their guide into all truth (cf. Jn. 16:13). The bishops’ new doctrine, that prophecy ended with the apostles, eventually made Montanus and others whom God sent seem wrong, if not outright ridiculous, just for being filled with the Spirit and prophesying.

In sum, Christians’ rejection of Montanus meant that anyone other than a Christian minister, even if God had anointed and sent him, “was no longer a possible source of authority. . . . The Spirit became a silent guiding presence [according to the Christian clergy], granted at [water] baptism to each Christian [according to the Christian clergy] and present, but not so vociferous, in Christian life [according to the Christian clergy].”²⁵² “The criteria for teaching and leading ceased to be the calling or gifting of the Spirit, but was instead, ordination by ecclesiastical officials.”²⁵³

By forsaking Paul’s gospel, believers were guilty of treachery against Christ. They certainly did not see it that way, but the apostate spirit they were persuaded to follow ate away at their faith like a cancer until Rome loved them and took them to bed. Human intellect then replaced the Spirit as their guiding force, and the spiritual power that was once prevalent among them died out, having been supplanted by political power.

²⁵⁰ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), preface.

²⁵¹ Cf. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 53.

²⁵² Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988. First published 1987 by Alfred A. Knopf), 409.

²⁵³ Hyatt, *Charismatic Christianity*, 30.

Paul's Vision for the Body of Christ

Christians' rejection of Montanus flung open the door to the spirits of this age and

contributed to the now rapid disappearance of spiritual gifts. By the third century, Origen would state explicitly that "these signs have diminished."²⁵⁴ The freedom of the Spirit was being replaced by ceremonial ritual and ecclesiastical order. The final blow to the charismatic character of *Christians*^b would come with the conversion of Constantine and *Christians*'^b acquisition of earthly affluence and power.²⁵⁵

There is no contradicting James Dunn's assessment that among second-century believers, in almost every place, the Spirit's power and gifts were becoming "subordinate to office, to ritual, and to tradition."²⁵⁶ That alone was cause enough for Montanus to sound the warning to believers that a great apostasy was sweeping through the vineyard of God. Asterius was lying when he said that Montanus reviled the entire body of Christ under heaven. Montanus loved the body of Christ, and he was trying to save it. Paul's vision, shared by Montanus, was of the body of Christ functioning as a "charismatic community under the control of the Spirit of Christ,"²⁵⁷ but neither he nor Montanus could persuade enough believers of their vision to make it a reality. The refusal of believers to live in the Spirit and to worship only "in spirit and truth" had not changed when God raised Montanus up; indeed, the stubbornness was more entrenched than it was in Paul's time.

So, it needs to be asked, who exactly were the Christians of the second century and beyond who claimed authority from God to declare a gospel characterized by rituals? That obvious question has seldom been asked. But why? What is the harm in wanting to know? And what is the harm in knowing?

²⁵⁴ Origen's full statement was "The Holy Spirit gave signs of his presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and after his ascension, he gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in a few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel." *Against Celsus*, VII.viii.

²⁵⁵ Hyatt, *Charismatic Christianity*, 30.

²⁵⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997. First published 1975 by SCM Press, London), 349.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

Increasing Worldly Success

Because Montanus failed, as did Paul, to persuade believers of their need to repent, by 180, Christians were given to making their rituals increasingly somber and impressive, and thus, as has been said, they attracted an increasing number of Pagans. The writings of Clement of Alexandria are those of a man determined to make his faith relevant to Pagans, knowing that success depended on his ability to show that his Christian religion was “not inconsistent with a cultivated and enlightened view of the universe.”²⁵⁸ And to that end, Clement, and others like him, presented their faith “in a way consistent with the best Pagan culture.”²⁵⁹ But in devising a gospel that was “cultivated and enlightened” and “consistent with the best pagan culture”, it was inevitable that Christians would slide on down into the abyss. Compare such an attitude with Paul’s, who said, “Am I seeking to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10b).

Catholic historian Robert Markus (1924–2010) saw that “from the later second century, Christians had been moving fast towards an assimilation of secular culture.”²⁶⁰ That movement was only an acceleration of what had already been taking place, for by the mid-second century, the apostate body of Christ “had already moved far away from its origins.”²⁶¹ Rather than godly wisdom or spiritual power, it was the Christians’ “accommodation to and alteration of the Roman culture that enabled *their faith*^a to become a universally practiced religion.”²⁶² The more that Christians shaped their gospel to the world, the more successful they were in making Pagans comfortable with it. By this means, their religion began

penetrating the upper classes of society, and more than one highly placed personage might wake up to find his wife embarrassing him by disappearing to nocturnal vigils and prayers. Marcia, the concubine of the emperor Commodus (161–192), was a Christian, and

²⁵⁸ Cook et al., *Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XII: The Imperial Crisis and Recovery A.D. 193–324*, 480.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 481.

²⁶⁰ Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. First published 1990), 27.

²⁶¹ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 143.

²⁶² Snyder, *Evidence of Church Life*, 296.

was able to gain for *believers*^b in Rome a considerable measure of relief [from the emperor].²⁶³

But worldly success for believers was an unmistakable sign of spiritual apostasy.

The gospel of Christ provides no bridge for believers to cross in order to adopt man's ways. Unbelievers may cross over to Christ, of course, but to do so, they must repent and forsake their ungodly ways, for life in the Spirit is as foreign to this world as God is to Zeus. Paul demanded of the saints in Corinth who were wavering in the Faith, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers! For what is there in common between righteousness and lawlessness? What fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony exists between Christ and Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2Cor. 6:14–15). But Paul's remonstrations against the apostasy he saw were as useless as were the lamentations of Tacitus, Livy, and Pliny over the apostasy of Rome from a Republic back to government by a king.²⁶⁴

Paul counseled Titus to reject any believer who refused to repent after being warned twice, "knowing that such a man has been perverted and is sinning, condemned within himself" (Tit. 3:10–11). With the rejection of Paul and then Montanus, Christians had twice turned Jesus down, and now, perverted and condemned in themselves, and in spite of what they claimed, they had conclusively rejected Christ (cf. Lk. 10:16).

The Established Lie

While even to our own time a few spiritual gifts remain among sincere believers, the body of Christ as a whole "never really recovered its balance after it rejected *Montanus' message*."²⁶⁵ Believers who trusted Christian leaders were persuaded to dismiss Montanus and support the new religion. Once that religion was established, it did not matter how much spiritual

²⁶³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 29.

²⁶⁴ The word apostasy refers to an abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief, and a few decades before Jesus was born, as is explained in Book 4 of this Series, *The Synthesis*, Rome abandoned its hard-won Republican form of government in order to be ruled again by a king. Similarly, a few decades after Jesus ascended into heaven, the body of Christ, with few exceptions, abandoned life in the Spirit in order to be subject again to rites and rules. Thus, the two Apostates, Rome and the body of Christ, began their tortuous journeys toward each other, culminating in the event I call the Synthesis. Had Romans been faithful to those who gave them the Republic, or had believers been faithful to the One who gave them the Spirit, the Synthesis could never have taken place, for the Republic was governed by senators who had no regard for the heavenly glory of Christ, and Christ and his apostles had no regard for the worldly glory of Rome.

²⁶⁵ Kilian McDonnell, quoted in Hyatt, *Charismatic Christianity*, 29.

power and wisdom a man had from God, for “claims to inspiration, no matter how extravagant, were of no avail unless what was inspired coincided with received orthodoxy.”²⁶⁶ But what if “received orthodoxy” is false? How will God speak to His people if they will listen only to men who agree with the established lie?²⁶⁷

A devoted Catholic, Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953) triumphantly offered this enthusiastic assessment of the situation: “By the year 200, the thing was done. As the Empire declined, the Catholic Church caught and preserved it.”²⁶⁸ That is impossible, of course, for the Catholic Church did not exist until the Synthesis of 325. The reality is that apostate believers, not the Catholic Church, “caught and preserved” the empire. And they caught and preserved it because they felt that the empire was worth catching and preserving, having drifted so far from the mind of Christ that they desired a worldly kingdom.

Before they were born of the Spirit in Acts 2, Jesus’ disciples also longed for an earthly kingdom, purged of Roman influence, of course. Even after his resurrection, they “kept asking him, saying, ‘Lord, is this the time you will re-establish the kingdom of Israel?’” (Acts 1:6). Paul taught that those who receive the Spirit are already in the kingdom that Jesus came to establish, “for the kingdom of God”, he wrote, “is righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). The baptism of the Spirit delivers us from the dominion of darkness and translates us into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13), and the wise are content with that, and they spend their lives not pursuing earthly things but in doing what Jesus told his disciples to do when they received the Spirit: “Be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). That is how believers overcome the world, not with military might, but with spiritual power, as Paul said: “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful through God for the tearing down of strongholds, demolishing sophistries and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought into captivity for obedience to Christ” (2Cor. 10:3–5).

But in forsaking life and worship in the Spirit, Christians came to yearn for an earthly kingdom, and in the Synthesis, their desire was

²⁶⁶ David L. Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 90.

²⁶⁷ This is “institutionalized slander”, a concept explained in Book 1 of this Series, *Slander*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

²⁶⁸ Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1992. First published 1920 by Paulist Press), 51.

realized. But never in the history of mankind was so Pyrrhic a victory won. What treasures they had lost in that victory! And besides, by that time, the empire wanted them as well. In the Synthesis, Rome caught and preserved the Christians as much as they did the empire.

Ironically, in the Synthesis, Christians became an earthly kingdom *with* the Romans, not purged of them. Because of their apostasy from Christ, Christians were cursed by God to have what their darkened hearts wanted, but with the spirit of Rome added. God's judgment of them is reminiscent of His judgment of the Israelites who, after being delivered from Egypt, longed to return to it again: "They said, each one to his brother, 'Let us appoint a leader, and let us return to Egypt!'" (Num. 14:4). "They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel. They lusted greatly in the wilderness and tested God in the desert, and so, He gave them what they asked for, but He sent leanness into their souls" (Ps. 106:13–15).



Remember

- Just as something tragic took place among first-century believers when they rejected Paul, so something tragic took place among second-century believers when they rejected Montanus.
- In the days of the apostles, the community of faith was distinguished by the power and gifts of the Spirit.
- There is no style of prophesying forbidden in Scripture.
- What determines the legitimacy of a prophet is only whether or not God has sent him.
- The earliest believers were supremely disinterested in fitting in with wicked men; their purpose in life was to please God in this world and secure their place in the next one.
- Believers added ritualism to their worship in the first century, but they fully gave themselves to it in the second.
- With first-century believers' rejection of Paul's gospel, despite their claims to the contrary, they had rejected Christ, and so it was with believers' second-century rejection of Montanus.
- When believers drift away from dependence on the power of the Spirit, it does not matter what they drift toward; whatever it is, is wrong.
- Reliance upon anything for salvation other than the power of God is misguided and vain.

- Christians were seduced into philosophical debate with sinners instead of simply being living testimonies of the saving grace of God and letting that be their victory.
- The Spirit plays second fiddle to nobody in the education of God's children.
- Nothing can alter the eternal gospel of Christ. When men add to it or deduct from it, it vanishes, and something else immediately stands in its place.
- The gospel of Christ endures, forever unsullied by anything of earth, and it waits patiently, unmoved, available for discovery by any sincere heart in any age who longs to know Christ.
- As much liberty as God's children have in nonessential matters, His doctrines are immutable.
- The decisions of the Christian leaders who colluded with Constantine were enforced by law.
- From its earliest days, Rome had never tolerated resistance to its authority, and it was no different when it became a Christian empire.
- The empire embraced its favored Christians, and its favored Christians embraced the empire.
- As long as the empire was persecuting them, Christians opposed violence, but after Constantine, they formulated doctrines to justify it.
- The ability to minister is created within a man by God through the Spirit.
- Only what comes through the Spirit of Christ glorifies God.
- With every ritual men perform, they deny that Christ purchased with his blood an entirely new kind of religion: a religion of the Spirit.
- In dismissing the Spirit's work as "Montanism", Christians were clearing the way for the ascendancy of their own clergy.
- Rome's elevation of Christians in 325 to the heights of worldly power and wealth was a final nail in the coffin of spiritual liberty, and the truth itself was outlawed.
- The less of the Spirit believers have, the more they look to men without the Spirit to lead them, and the more they look to men without the Spirit to lead them, the less of the Spirit they have.
- Christian ministers have marginalized those filled with the Spirit, making it normative for Christians everywhere to do the same.
- We are saved by grace through faith, not by knowledge.
- The liberty to operate freely in the Spirit is of God, who is not governed by men.

- Paul exhorted believers to stay filled with the Spirit, and the only alternative to that is to quench the Spirit, which our heavenly Father absolutely forbids.
- God's kind of government among His people leaves no room for what officials of the Roman Universal Church did to untold thousands over the centuries who would not submit to them.
- The original body of Christ refused any connection with men's ways, but fellowship with darkness was key to the political success of Christians.
- By forsaking Paul's gospel, believers were guilty of treachery against Christ.
- The more that Christians shaped their gospel to the world, the more successful they were in making Pagans comfortable with it.
- Worldly success for believers was an unmistakable sign of spiritual apostasy.
- The gospel of Christ provides no bridge for believers to cross in order to adopt man's ways.
- With the rejection of Paul and then Montanus, Christians had conclusively rejected Christ.
- How will God speak to His people if they will listen only to men who agree with the established lie?
- The baptism of the Spirit delivers us from the dominion of darkness and translates us into the kingdom of Christ.
- Believers overcome the world with spiritual power, not with military might.
- In forsaking life and worship in the Spirit, Christians came to yearn for an earthly kingdom, and in the Synthesis, their desire was realized.
- Because of their apostasy from Christ, Christians were cursed by God to have what their darkened hearts wanted.

SECTION 3: The New Standard

What Were They Hiding?

That Montanus was not at first rejected by Christians can only have been because (1) he was doctrinally sound, (2) he was morally irreproachable, and (3) spiritual power and gifts such as his were still acknowledged as legitimate by Christians. That being so, the thing that turned Christian leaders against Montanus must have been that the Spirit, speaking through Montanus, censured them, and instead of repenting, they chose to condemn the Spirit by which Montanus spoke.

We know what early Christian writers wanted posterity to think Montanus did and said, but what was it that they did *not* want us to know about him? Firmilian (died c. 269) contemptuously brushed off questions that arose concerning the doctrines and deeds of the “Cataphrygians”, saying, “It is tedious to reply to their several statements.”²⁶⁹ But was it really? He and other Christians certainly did not feel that it was tedious to spend an enormous amount of time denouncing what they *claimed* Montanus taught. But what did Montanus really teach? The Apostates did not want us to know.

That no Christian ever brought credible charges against Montanus concerning his doctrine or personal conduct leads one to wonder what it was about him that Christians wanted to keep secret. Did he preach the forsaken and forgotten gospel of Paul plainly enough to expose them as frauds? What did Montanus receive from God that Christians refused to record, leaving succeeding generations with nothing by which to judge Montanus but what Christians wrote about him?

Tabbernee pointed out that

much of the source material required for an accurate reconstruction of the history of the *Spirit-filled Faith*^e has been destroyed by ecclesiastical authorities who, in the post-Constantinian era, often carried out their *anti-Montanus*^d activities in concert with Christian emperors who feared that heresy and schism would cause the withdrawal of God’s favor.²⁷⁰

In plain words, superstitious fear motivated Christian emperors to support Roman Church leaders in their vain efforts to eradicate from the earth the move of the Spirit which Montanus represented. The resultant lack of information about him left an enormous void where answers could have been concerning why Montanus was condemned. To fill that void, as the previous chapter abundantly showed, Christians invented sins for Montanus to have committed and bizarre doctrines for him to have taught. Having nothing about Montanus’ manner of life to condemn, and unable to gainsay his doctrine, that was the only option left to Christians.

²⁶⁹ Cyprian, Epistle LXXIV.7, from Firmilian, eds. Roberts, Alexander and James Donaldson, Vol. 5, *Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 392.

²⁷⁰ Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia*, 1. Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, I.9.

The Proper Way to Prophecy

The descriptions of Montanus provided by his early detractors indicate that, like prophets of old, Montanus prophesied in a way that made onlookers to know that the Spirit was upon him. Ecstatic speech and behavior had a long history among God's prophets, and so, Christian leaders had to devise a new standard to justify their condemnation of those who behaved that way, and then persuade believers of it.

Asterius was among the first to propose such a standard. He claimed that a fellow Christian named Alcibiades had proved "the impropriety of a prophet's speaking in ecstasy,"²⁷¹ though, not surprisingly, Asterius provided none of Alcibiades' "proof". Later in Asterius' anti-Montanus diatribe, he made the strange claim that "the false prophet falls into an ecstasy, in which he is without shame or fear. Beginning with purposed ignorance, he passes on to involuntary madness of soul. They [Montanus and company] cannot show that one of the old or one of the new prophets was thus carried away in spirit."²⁷² That is transparently false, as Asterius must have known. It was Asterius himself who with "purposed ignorance" failed to mention the ecstatic experience of King Saul: "The Spirit of God came upon him, and as he walked along, he prophesied until he entered Naioth in Ramah. Then he stripped off his clothes, and falling down naked, he prophesied before Samuel all that day and all night. That is why they say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (1Sam. 19:23b–24). Is that not what one would call ecstasy?

In demanding that prophets act in a poised, measured manner, Asterius was promoting a radical change in how spiritual experience should be judged, and it was contrary to how prophets had ever been judged. Old Testament prophets, when speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit, were often clearly beside themselves, so to speak, when they were moved upon by the Spirit. When the Spirit of God came upon King Saul, he certainly did not act as he normally did, and anyone who saw him knew it. The question, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" tells us that the onlookers connected Saul's unusual behavior with true prophets; they did not consider his behavior to be abnormal for those upon whom the Spirit of God came.

To accuse Spirit-filled people of madness is a consistent attribute of apostate believers. One such man, who belonged to my congregation, expressed to me on several occasions over the years, a longing to be more

²⁷¹ "The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus", VIII, 7:337.

²⁷² Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvii.2.

full of the Spirit than he was. Losing sight of that, he drifted away from righteousness and eventually abandoned his godly wife and small child. Then, to humiliate his wife, and us, he filed a lawsuit to take her son away from her, saying that she and others in our meetings often fall under a “spell” and neglect our children. He was saying to the public, in effect, that we do not worship as good Christians do, but that an evil spirit comes over us and, so, endangers the young. He knew better, but his slander was effective. Likewise, Asterius knew his slander of Montanus was false, but it was also effective among many. The go-to slander of Asterius’ day, and beyond, was to condemn Spirit-filled believers as “Montanists”; in our time, it is to call them a cult, a fringe movement, or something like “Holy Rollers”. That tactic is useful to Christians because once they have labelled a group of people, they feel justified in ignoring their testimonies and in refusing to reason together with them.

Asterius also purposely did not mention the unusual behavior sometimes commanded of God’s prophets, such as Isaiah, whom God commanded to walk about naked and barefoot in Jerusalem for three years (Isa. 20:2–3). Later, God made Ezekiel lay siege to a model of Jerusalem, lying on one side every day, unable to turn, for three hundred and ninety days, and then lying on the other side, unable to turn, for forty more (Ezek. 4:1–8)! All that time—well over a year—God allowed him only a small amount of water each day, and a small loaf of bread, which Ezekiel himself had to bake and which he was commanded to bake using human excrement (Ezek. 4:9–12). Asterius, again with “purposed ignorance”, failed to mention the ecstasy of Peter in Acts 10:10, or the ecstasy of those who spoke in tongues in Acts 2, 10, and 19, or Jesus’ unusual behavior that made his disciples marvel and fear as they walked behind him (Mk. 10:32). There is nothing evil or unwise about being moved by the Spirit in a way that onlookers might describe as ecstatic.

To be filled with God’s Spirit is beyond ordinary human experience; should we not, then, expect such supernatural power to make us feel things we do not ordinarily feel and to move us to act in ways that are not typical of earthly life? Some Churchmen, even after the Synthesis, admitted as much. It sounds as if Hilary of Poitiers was speaking from experience when he wrote, “The Holy Spirit is called a river. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are made drunk. Because various streams of grace flow out of us, the prophet prays that the Lord will inebriate us. The prophet wants the same persons to be made drunk, and filled to all full-

ness with the divine gifts.”²⁷³ If Hilary ever thus yielded to the Spirit, there is no record of it, but his testimony makes it seem likely that he did. However, it is even more than likely that had Hilary ever demonstrated such ecstasy in a Christian Church service, he would be known to history not as a saint and doctor of the Church but as a mad, raving “Montanist”.

Signs of the True Body of Christ

God’s prophets were always easy to identify because they spoke and acted out of the ordinary. And in the New Testament, the “better covenant” (Heb. 8:6), Jesus made it clear that all believers, not just prophets, would be easy to identify: “These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name, they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mk. 16:17–18). Asterius must have known that.

To show that Montanus was false, Asterius used the fact that the gift of prophecy radically diminished after his death,²⁷⁴ for Montanus, he knew, had taught that prophetic utterances would always be part of the body of Christ and that all who truly believe experience “the gifts of grace”.²⁷⁵ But with the increasingly accepted new standard for judging the legitimacy of a prophet, namely, submission to Spiritless Christian bishops, Christians were driving away the Spirit of grace, as Christ had said through Maximilla: “I am chased like a wolf from the sheep.”

Asterius’ fundamental error was in assuming that because he was part of the Christian Movement, he was in the body of Christ. Montanus knew better. He told the truth when he said that signs of the Spirit are present wherever the true body of Christ is found, just as Jesus said. Holding to that standard, Montanus denounced the Christian Movement’s claim to be the body of Christ, even though it was lacking in the signs of the Spirit. Montanus saw the Christian Movement for what it was, and he warned God’s children of it even before all their signs were gone.

Paul certainly did not flinch from confessing his ecstatic experiences. He wrote to the saints, “If we be out of our mind, it is to God, or if we be in our right mind, it is to you” (2Cor. 5:13). And we know he was referring to such things as speaking in tongues because he also told them, “He

²⁷³ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 183, quoting Hilary’s Tract on the Psalms, 64:14.

²⁷⁴ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, X, 7:337.

²⁷⁵ Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, 48.2.1.

who speaks in a tongue is speaking to God, for no one understands, but he is speaking mysteries in the Spirit” (1Cor. 14:2).

Had Asterius been present on Pentecost morning, he would no doubt have been among the scoffers ridiculing Jesus’ disciples for acting as they were: “Mocking, they kept saying, ‘They are full of new wine’” (Acts 2:13). He certainly condemned the Spirit-filled saints in Phrygia for acting that way, saying that they “talked wildly and unreasonably and strangely, like [Montanus].”²⁷⁶ Of Montanus himself, Asterius wrote that he

was carried away in spirit; and suddenly being seized with a kind of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to speak and to utter strange things, and to prophesy in a manner contrary to the custom of *believers*^b, as handed down from early times and preserved thenceforward in a continuous succession.²⁷⁷

What a liar Asterius was! He knew that Montanus and those like him were not acting contrary to the saints of old; indeed, just the opposite was true. Asterius and his fellow Christians were the ones introducing novel ideas and demanding that prophets fit a mold that God never cast.

Asterius’ sarcastic characterization of Montanus is no evidence of Montanus being a heretic. Rather, in the light of how the Spirit has often moved God’s prophets and others, it indicates that Asterius was a stranger to the real Jesus and the true Spirit of God.

Justification of the New Standard

In an effort to dissuade a woman from following after the Spirit-filled life, Jerome craftily justified to her the Church’s lack of spiritual power by saying that no one any longer received the Spirit the way the earliest followers of Jesus did, for their receiving it completely fulfilled the prophecy and promise of the Lord:

As regards the scriptures brought together from the gospel of John with which a certain votary of Montanus has assailed you, scriptures in which our Savior promises that He will go to the Father and that He will send the Comforter, . . . the Holy Spirit came down, and the tongues of the believers were cloven, so that each spoke every language. . . . If, then, the apostle Peter, upon whom the Lord has founded the Church, expressly said that the

²⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.9.

²⁷⁷ “The Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus”, II, 7:335.

prophecy and promise of the Lord were then and there fulfilled, how can we claim another fulfillment for ourselves?²⁷⁸

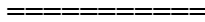
In other words, the baptism of the Spirit which the disciples received in Acts 2 was an unrepeatable experience, and the formation of a formal, ceremonial religion without spiritual power was God's plan from the beginning. According to Jerome, then, Jesus suffered and died to found the religious system called Christianity, not to baptize souls with his Father's holy Spirit; that experience was given only to a few in the beginning in order to jump-start the New Testament. Jerome's position approximates that of most Christians to this day, despite the fact that after Acts 2, the Pentecost experience was repeated (e.g., Acts 10:44–46), and it continued to be repeated years after Pentecost (Acts 19:1–6; 1Cor. 12:1–11; Gal. 3:5). And it continues to be repeated to this day, every time a sinner sincerely repents and asks God for mercy in the name of His Son Jesus. After all, on Pentecost morning, Peter told the multitude in Jerusalem that Christ's baptism of the Spirit was not only for them, but for their children and "to all who are far off, as many as the LORD our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Jerome immersed himself into Constantine's Church-based religion, which by Jerome's time, was far along in making the lack of personal spiritual experience the norm, and Jerome's superlative intellect alone was sufficient for him to become a high-ranking Churchman. But the religion in which he excelled through intellectual brilliance was foreign to the Christ it claimed to represent. Jerome knew nothing of the baptism of the Spirit, and so, he did not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9b) and had no authority to say anything on his behalf. Think of it. The Roman Church exalted Jerome to be a doctor of the Christian faith even though God had not even cleansed him from sin. But then, Christ's cleansing baptism of the Spirit is not necessary in order to become an admired and distinguished minister in a religion that has rejected the real Spirit of God.

In 390, Jerome's fellow Apostate, the famed orator, John Chrysostom ("Golden Mouth"), pontificated upon the absence of spiritual gifts within the Roman Church. In a sermon on the spiritual gifts outlined in 1Corinthians 12:1–10, he said, "This whole passage is very obscure, but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to [i.e., gifts of the Spirit] and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur

²⁷⁸ Jerome, *To Marcella*, Letter XLI.1–2, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 6, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (New York, The Christian Literature Company, 1893), 55.

but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why did they then happen, and now do so no more?"²⁷⁹ Then, Golden Mouth changed the subject and never answered the question. Nor could he have done so if he tried, for he did not understand that in condemning Spirit-filled worship, Christians of his ilk had rejected Christ in order to continue to develop their false gospel. Instead of heeding Montanus and being renewed in spirit, Christians followed their blind guides and plunged into the deep ditch of a man-made religion.



Remember

- Superstitious fear motivated Christian emperors to support Christian leaders in their vain effort to eradicate from the earth the move of the Spirit which Montanus represented.
- Christians invented sins for Montanus to have committed and bizarre doctrines for him to have taught.
- The principal excuse for condemning Montanus which Christians came up with was to condemn *the way* Montanus behaved when the Spirit came upon him.
- To accuse Spirit-filled people of madness is a consistent attribute of apostate believers.
- Once Christians have labeled people, they feel justified in ignoring their testimonies and refusing to reason with them.
- There is nothing evil or unwise about being moved by the Spirit.
- God's prophets were always easy to identify because they spoke and acted out of the ordinary.
- Signs of the Spirit are present wherever the true body of Christ is found.
- Christ's cleansing baptism of the Spirit is not necessary in order to become an admired and distinguished minister in a religion that has rejected the real Spirit of God.
- Instead of heeding Montanus and being renewed in spirit, Christians followed their blind guides and plunged into the deep ditch of a man-made religion.

²⁷⁹ Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, XXIX, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. 12, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1889), 168.

SECTION 4: A Monumental Event
“A Just Matter of Surprise”

There is no comparison between the spiritual power of first-century believers and the lack of it in the following centuries, especially after Montanus. Paul’s instruction to first-century believers concerning how to use their spiritual gifts (cf. 1Cor. 12, 14) was not relevant to many second-century believers, especially after Montanus. That remarkable change, from a charismatic Faith to a faith of ritual and ecclesiastical form, was a monumental event which, first of all, should never have happened, and secondly, should have caused believers of the time to tremble and to plead with God for forgiveness and a restoration of the true Faith.

It is remarkable, based on the writings of early Christians, that those who lived when spiritual power was diminishing gave it so little attention. Nothing explains that lack of attention except that the spiritual life found among the earliest believers died very slowly and, so, was less noticeable than a sudden end would have been. As Hatch noted, “The spirit of prophecy only gradually passed away.”²⁸⁰ But the loss did not escape the Lord’s notice; thus, Montanus’ warning cry. Moreover, the confident, philosophical justifications of Christian leaders for the decrease in spiritual power drowned out for many the convicting voice of the Spirit.

It is also remarkable how little attention the loss of spiritual power has been given by believers through the centuries, for it is a monumental historical development that begs for an explanation. One historian who took note of that lack of attention was Edward Gibbon, and he marveled at it:

Since every friend to revelation²⁸¹ is persuaded of the reality, and every reasonable man is convinced of the cessation of miraculous powers, it is evident that there must have been some period in which they were either suddenly or gradually withdrawn from the Christian *community*^b.²⁸² Whatever era is chosen for that purpose, . . . the insensibility of the Christians who lived at that time will equally afford a just matter of surprise.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, ed. A. M. Fairbairn (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995. Originally published London: Williams and Norgate, 1895), 320.

²⁸¹ That is, those who believe that the miraculous stories in the Bible really happened.

²⁸² Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (VX.iii), Vol. 1 (Everyman’s Library 1910. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 522.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

Then, the daring Gibbon suggested something which brought into doubt the validity of Christianity's claim to represent Christ, comparing that claim with the fraudulent claim of a forger. It is no wonder that Gibbon's books were banned in several countries.²⁸⁴

[Christians] still supported their pretensions after they had lost their power. . . . The recent [i.e., first-century] experience of genuine miracles should have instructed the [second-century] Christian world in the ways of Providence and habituated their eye to the style of the divine artist[, but it did not]. Should the most skillful painter of modern Italy presume to decorate his feeble imitations with the name of Raphael . . . , the insolent fraud would be soon discovered, and indignantly rejected.²⁸⁵

Rome helped Christians escape being discovered and rejected by enforcing their claim to represent Christ in spite of their feeble imitations of him. Consequently, their lie became the basis for Western society, and over time, the whole world came to believe that Christianity represented Christ. It was an astonishing accomplishment for the Enemy of righteousness to come up with a lie the whole world would believe, Christian and non-Christian alike, but being "full of wisdom" (Ezek. 28:12), he did (Rev. 12:9). Christianity is a false religion so great that one does not even have to be religious to bear its mark; even atheists believe the lie that Christianity represents Christ.

Two Camps

The relatively few Christians who have given thought to the loss of spiritual power and gifts are divided into two principal camps. Those who are not "friends of revelation" hold that the miracles of the Bible never really happened but are stories devised by wise men to make profound, philosophical points concerning God and life. The second group holds with Jerome, that the miracles really happened but that the loss of spiritual power was God's plan from the beginning, for once the Church was established, the miracle-working power of the Spirit was no longer needed. Only a minority have considered the third option, the one that Gibbon posed and that Montanus would have said is the truth: the feeble Christian religion is a fraud.

²⁸⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Edward Gibbon", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, date accessed May 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Edward_Gibbon&oldid=1220023306.

²⁸⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1:522–523 (VX.iii).

For Paul, the Faith of Christ was altogether of the Spirit and in the Spirit. The ceremonial faith of the Christians, on the other hand, is altogether in the flesh. In order for the Faith of Christ to exist, Jesus had to rise from the dead, as Paul said: “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain” (1Cor. 15:14). But it is not so with Christianity. There is not a single Christian ceremony that men must have the Spirit of God to perform, and there is not a single Christian doctrine that only men with the Spirit can teach. Other than what Christians claim, their religion could exist if Jesus had never lived on earth, and indeed, their religion did exist among Pagans in a different form. Only the holy name which Christians attached to their cheap imitation of the Faith gave it any credence, or gives it any today.

The true gospel teaches us that the holy Spirit is not merely the best source of truth, but that it is the *only* source of truth, and by that truth, the sandy foundation of Christianity is revealed. Christianity is what the apostle Paul called a “word only” religion (1Thess. 1:5), while “the kingdom of God”, he said, “is not in word, but in power” (1Cor. 4:20). Paul reminded the saints in Corinth of what they had seen in him: “My message and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1Cor. 2:4–5). We would do well to remember that message.

A Total Difference

Other than in words and phrases which Christianity hijacked from the Faith, it bears no resemblance to the Faith at all. Christianity and the Faith of Christ are fundamentally different religions, one being a ceremonial religion of the flesh and the other being a religion of life, altogether in the Spirit. That is what makes the statement true that Paul’s gospel has never been taught by a Christian minister. They cannot teach it because their religion cannot survive a gospel that excludes ceremony.

The complete difference between the original Faith and Christianity was admitted by Philoxenus, a sixth-century scholar and cleric, who wrote, “The difference between what happened among the first believers and that which happens now in us is total.”²⁸⁶ It is puzzling why anyone who recognized that would remain in such a religion, but most likely, Philoxenus remained a Christian because by his time, the shame of not being a Christian equalled the shame which ancient peoples felt at not

²⁸⁶ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 325.

being Roman. The Roman genius had only changed Rome's form; with Christianity, Rome's crafty spirit once again had found a way to survive.

The Origin of Christianity

It is astonishing that so few perceive the importance of the fact that Christianity began with Constantine, not with Christ. Historian Charles Freeman (1947–) is typical of the vast majority of historians when he states his belief that “the original message of Christianity was proclaimed by a spiritual leader [Jesus] who suffered the most humiliating punishments the empire could administer.”²⁸⁷ But the reality is that “the original message of Christianity” is what Constantine and the Council of Nicea decreed in 325, not what Jesus or his apostles taught three centuries earlier.

Making the same assumption as Freeman, Desmond O’Grady (1935–2014) said that the Faith which began to be proclaimed in Galilee was destined to “transform Rome but was also shaped by it.”²⁸⁸ But it was not the Faith that Jesus preached which transformed Rome; it was the faith of Christians. Their faith was what transformed Rome and, in turn, was transformed by it. In the Synthesis of 325, Constantine exalted the doctrine of certain Christians and used Rome’s military might to enforce their version of the gospel upon the world. For their part, those Christians used their appearance of sanctity to declare God’s blessing upon Rome’s worldly power—just as Rome’s genius knew they would do if granted enough favors.²⁸⁹

Dean Farrar of Canterbury taught that “the apparent triumph of Christianity was in some sense and for a time a real defeat, the corruption of its simplicity, the defacement of its purest and loftiest beauty.”²⁹⁰ But that observation perpetuates the Christian myth concerning the origin of Christianity. Rome did not corrupt the simplicity and beauty of the original Faith; nothing on earth has the power to do that. Moreover, Rome did not even corrupt Christians, for Christians were already corrupted when they blended with Rome. It was for their apostasy that God cursed them to mate with the world’s supreme political power.

²⁸⁷ Charles Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 216.

²⁸⁸ O’Grady, *Victory of the Cross*, 28.

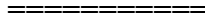
²⁸⁹ Rome’s genius is explained in detail in Book 4 of this Series, *The Synthesis*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

²⁹⁰ Quoted by Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, 197.

No One Like Montanus

Since the second century, there has been no one quite like Montanus, who clearly saw the wrong direction many believers were taking and labored earnestly to stop it. And once the belief that Christianity began with Jesus became the norm, it wielded such power over men's minds that through the millennia, even some of the sincerest believers stubbornly clung to it. Martin Luther (1483–1546), who begat the Reformation, came short of Montanus' stature because he believed that Christianity originated with Jesus, and so, he could not denounce it. Oral Roberts (1918–2009) was a prince in the kingdom of God who turned more minds toward the real Jesus than any man since the apostle Paul, but he, too, believed that Christianity originated with Jesus and encouraged sinners to become Christians, and Christians to be faithful in church attendance.

Christians never accused either Martin Luther or Oral Roberts, as they did Montanus, of reviling the entire body of Christ under heaven because those two great men taught that Christianity *was* the body of Christ. They never understood that Christianity began with Constantine, and so, they never saw, as Montanus did, the danger of God's people belonging to it. Had they done so, they may well have echoed, as Montanus did, the cry of the Father to His children who are in Christianity: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues!" (Rev. 18:4).



Remember

- The whole world believes the lie that Christianity represents Christ.
- Christianity is a false religion so great that one does not even have to be religious to bear its mark, for even atheists believe that Christianity represents Christ.
- The feeble Christian religion is a fraud.
- There is not a single Christian ceremony that men must have the Spirit of God to perform, and there is not a single Christian doctrine that only men with the Spirit can teach.
- Other than what Christians claim, their religion could exist if Jesus had never lived on earth.
- Only the holy name which Christians attached to their cheap imitation of the Faith gave it any credence, or gives it any today.
- The true gospel teaches us that the holy Spirit is the only source of truth.

- Christianity and the Faith of Christ are fundamentally different religions.
- Paul's gospel has never been taught by a Christian minister.
- With Christianity, Rome's crafty genius once again found a way to survive.
- Christianity began with Constantine, not with Christ.
- It was not the Faith that Jesus preached which transformed Rome; it was the faith of Christians.
- Christians used their appearance of sanctity to declare God's blessing upon Rome's worldly power, just as Rome's genius knew they would do if granted enough favors.
- Christians were already corrupted when they blended with Rome. It was for their apostasy that God cursed them to mate with the world's supreme political power.
- Since the second century, there has been no one quite like Montanus.

Chapter Five

Modern Accusations

The Editor of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*
(published between 1867 and 1873)

Von Campenhausen made the perceptive point that the body of Christ was not created as, and was never supposed to become,

another constitutional organization with grades and classes, but a unitary, living cosmos of free, spiritual gifts which serve and complement one another. . . . *Believers*^c have the Spirit of Christ. Because of this, spontaneity, obedience, and love are, in fact, presupposed and required . . . as, so to speak, the “normal” thing. When the *body of Christ*^b ceases to be spiritual, that is to say, when within her that which is normal for the world is exalted into a law, then in Paul’s eyes, she is dead.²⁹¹

More importantly, in *God’s* eyes, she is dead, and that was Montanus’ point. He saw that believers were dying because they were ceasing to be spiritual.

The following assessment by the editor of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* for why Christians condemned Montanus is largely accurate:

The fault found by *Christians*^b with Montanus’ prophecy was rather because of its form than because of its substance. It was admitted that the prophecies contained much that was true, but the soberer sense of *Christians*^b at large objected decidedly to the frenzied ecstasy in which they were delivered. That a change had come over *Christians*^b in this respect since the apostolic age is perfectly clear. In Paul’s time, the speaking with tongues, which involved a similar kind of ecstasy, was very common. . . . But the early enthusiasm of *believers*^b had largely passed away by the middle of the second century; and though there were still prophets, they were not in general characterized by the same ecstatic and

²⁹¹ Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 63–64.

frenzied utterance that marked their predecessors. To say that there were none such at this time would be rash; but it is plain that they had become so decidedly the exception that the revival of *those like Montanus*^d of the old method [of prophesying] on a large scale and in its extremest form could appear to *Christians*^b at large only a decided innovation. Prophecy in itself was nothing strange to them, but prophecy in this form they were not accustomed to, and did not realize that it was but a revival of the ancient form.²⁹²

This assessment of Montanus' situation is good, but it falls short of perfect accuracy because of the editor's bias against Pentecostal-style worship. The prudent reader will note that it is only the editor's opinion that Montanus' prophesying was an extreme form, delivered in a "frenzied ecstasy" to which the "soberer sense of *Christians*^b at large objected"; those statements do not qualify as historical fact. But the question should be asked, what if that opinion belongs to a man who does not know God? What if Montanus' manner of prophesying was not extreme, but normal for prophets who were moved upon by the Spirit? What if Montanus' ecstasy was not wildly excited or uncontrolled, which is what "frenzied" means? And what if it was not the soberer sense of Christians which objected to him, but the stubbornness of Christians bent on maintaining a bastard course? What then? Shouldn't that, at least, be considered?

In spite of its failings, however, the above assessment of Montanus provides information that is no doubt accurate:

- Christians did not reject Montanus because he was teaching false doctrines.
- Montanus acted and spoke in a way consistent with that of earliest believers.
- First-century speaking in tongues involved a kind of ecstasy similar to that experienced by Montanus and others in Phrygia.
- A substantive change had come over believers since the days of the apostles, so that Montanus' behavior appeared to Christians to be an innovation in worship.
- Among Christians, Spirit-filled worship ("enthusiasm") had largely passed away by the middle of the second century.

²⁹² Eusebius, *Church History*, V.xvi.9, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 1, *A Select Library of the Christian Church Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1995. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), 231n14.

God's word and power do not go out of style. Men may change to suit their times, but the power and gifts of God do not. By the mid-second century, those who called themselves Christians had drifted so far from the truth that the original way of New Testament worship seemed odd to them when they saw it. They were far along in the process of devising new standards for determining right and wrong, but Montanus would have nothing to do with it. He and those with him were continuing in the Spirit-filled worship of the earliest believers, and that is actually why they were condemned.

Will Durant (1885–1981)

Will Durant was an American historian and philosopher.

Durant's bias against Montanus led him to mindlessly accept early Christian judgments of Montanus' style of worship. Consequently, he joined them in ridiculing Montanus' preaching as "performances conducted to ritual fever and theological chaos" which Christians were right to suppress.²⁹³ Durant was a historian, but that judgment is not historical fact; it was only Durant's opinion. Evidence from the Bible and other sources show that God's "true prophets were men and women who *could be observed* [emphasis mine] to surrender all personal initiative,"²⁹⁴ but Durant concluded, with no justification, that the surrender which was typical of prophets sent by God led Montanus into "ritual fever and theological chaos", not into giving a message from the God who sent him.

Durant also accused Montanus of "an absorbed asceticism", adding the equally unsubstantiated charges that "marriage and parentage were neglected" and that among those with Montanus, "goods were communistically shared."²⁹⁵ No one knows that Montanus was an ascetic, and no one knows whether or not Montanus was married, much less that he and those with him neglected their spouses and children. Nor does anyone know whether or not Montanus and his fellow believers held all things in common. Moreover, Durant assures his readers, with a flair, that "Montanus prophesied with such eloquent ecstasy that his Phrygian followers—with the same religious enthusiasm that had once begotten Dionysus—hailed him as the Paraclete [the holy Spirit] promised by Christ."²⁹⁶ This, even though there is no proof of the ancient slander that

²⁹³ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 599.

²⁹⁴ Brown, P., *Making of Late Antiquity*, 67.

²⁹⁵ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 605.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

those with Montanus revered him as being the holy Spirit. All those accusations are the fruit of Durant's bias; none of them are established, historical fact.

The old story from Procopius of a mass suicide by believers associated with Montanus was also mindlessly repeated by Durant, who wrote that during a Christian onslaught against them, "some Montanists gathered in their churches, set fire to them, and let themselves be burned alive."²⁹⁷ Based on that ancient rumor, a number of scholars teach, with Durant, that Montanus encouraged believers to provoke others to kill them so that they might become martyrs.²⁹⁸ Another fanciful tale from long ago which Durant regurgitates is that in about 190, hundreds of believers like Montanus, eager for paradise, begged a Roman proconsul named Antonius to slay them so that they could become martyrs. But "he could not accommodate them all; some he executed; but most of them he dismissed with the words: 'Miserable creatures! If you wish to die, are there not ropes and cliffs [from which to hang yourselves]?'"²⁹⁹ That a Roman proconsul would say such a thing is believable, but that believers associated with Montanus provoked him to say it by begging him to make martyrs of them smacks of Christians' anti-Montanus mythmaking.

That ancient story, used to disparage Phrygian saints for begging a Roman proconsul to kill them, stands in stark contrast to Christians' treatment of the Church father, Ignatius. Him, Christians laud for doing what they claim Montanus and those with him did. According to the glowing account of Ignatius' death, anonymously written, it was with "great alacrity and joy through his desire to suffer" that Ignatius departed from Antioch on his journey toward Rome (*Martyrdom of Ignatius*, III). He wrote to his fellow Apostates, "I hope, through your prayers, that I may be devoured by beasts at Rome" (*Ignatius to the Ephesians*, sv. I). In another place, he prayed, "Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts. . . . Let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ" (*Ignatius to the Romans*, IV). To my knowledge, Christians have never used Ignatius' sick desire to be eaten by lions against him, but admired it as an expression of holy faith.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. This rumor of a mass suicide was apparently started by Procopius (*Secret History*, XI.23), and thereafter spread by anti-Montanus Christians.

²⁹⁸ For William Tabbernee's rebuttal to that theory, see "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom", *Colloquium* 17, no. 2 (1985): 33-44, https://www.academia.edu/27317663/Early_Montanism_and_Voluntary_Martyrdom.

²⁹⁹ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 605.

Nor is there historical evidence sufficient to justify Durant's forwarding of the ancient rumor that Montanus prophesied that the New Jerusalem would descend from heaven to his hometown in Phrygia. According to Durant, Montanus "announced that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and that the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse would soon descend from heaven upon a neighboring plain."³⁰⁰ But that slanderous myth, provided by Durant to his readers as historical fact, has no basis other than what some early Christians said.

So confidently did Durant speak about Montanus and his doctrine that one would think he had traveled back in time and listened in on Montanus' sermons. The tragedy is that Durant is not unique in that regard but typical. Most modern scholars exhibit an equal degree of confidence, while partaking of an equal degree of ignorance of what Montanus actually said and did.

John S. Whale (1896–1997)

John Whale was a Christian minister and theologian.³⁰¹

Whale taught that Montanus was the "head and front" of a "sect-type" of heresy that has intermittently "criticized, irritated, and menaced the official Church" throughout its history. Montanus, he said, was guilty of "disproportionate emphasis on a part" of the gospel which led to a "distortion of the whole". But could it not be that Christians disproportionately criticized Montanus, distorting the whole of his work by destroying his writings and making their version of Montanus the only one that remains?

Also, according to Whale, Montanus claimed that his prophecies were "a direct, new, and final outpouring of the Spirit" and that he was "the mouthpiece of the Spirit in a unique sense." Montanus, said Whale, "expressed old facts in a new, revolutionary, and frightening way." But his opinion that Montanus' doctrine was new and revolutionary is the result of his Christian bias, and he neglects to state what is obvious: if anyone was frightened, it was those devoted to the Christian Movement. It certainly did not frighten the multitudes who, like Montanus, were filled with the Spirit and happy about it.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ These criticisms of Montanus are found in an article J.S. Whale wrote for the *Expository Times* in 1934. "The Heresies of the Church and Recurring Heresies: Montanus", *Expository Times* 45, no. 11 (August 1934): 496–500, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001452463404501104>.

Whale sympathized somewhat with Montanus and his fellows for their opposition to Christians' "externalization of religion" and regimentation of the clergy, and for their futile call for a return to the Faith of the apostles, with its "primitive simplicity, spontaneity, and purity."

In short, according to Whale, Montanus missed the boat, so to speak, by not getting on board with Christians who were laboring to build a religion that would be understood and accepted by the populace, and eventually become a power in the world. But Montanus, like Paul, put all his effort toward building up believers in the power of the Spirit so that they could understand their God and be accepted by Him, not the world.

J. G. Davies (1919–1990)

J. G. Davies was a professor of theology at the University of Birmingham, in England.

Davies taught that the faith of Montanus was condemned by Christians because it "claimed to supersede the revelation contained in the gospels, because its doctrine of the Holy Spirit was extravagant, and because it was a disruptive force at a time when there was a desperate need for unity."³⁰² But all three of the professor's charges against Montanus are faulty. First, there is no credible evidence that Montanus claimed that what he preached superseded the revelation contained in the gospels. Second, there is no credible evidence that Montanus taught an "extravagant" doctrine about the holy Spirit. And third, never in the history of God's people, in either the Old or New Testaments, has there been for them "a desperate need for unity" with something evil. This, Montanus understood. The Christian Movement was the "something evil" of his time, and the Spirit moved him to warn believers against partaking in it.

Henry Chadwick (1920–2008)

Henry Chadwick was a British academic, theologian, and Church of England priest.

Chadwick asserted that the "weakest point" of Montanus' message was that it was divisive.³⁰³ But divisiveness is not a weakness if God's word causes it. Jesus said that his purpose was to bring division, not peace, even among family members (Lk. 12:51–53). Would Chadwick

³⁰² Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 90.

³⁰³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 53.

say that was a weak point in the gospel Jesus preached? Also, Paul said that for saints to separate themselves from apostate believers pleases God (1Cor. 5:9–13). Was that a weak point in Paul’s message?

Montanus would not have denied the charge of being a divisive figure any more than Jesus or Paul did, for his whole function, at heart, was to divide the sheep from the goats, the wise from the foolish, and the true from the false. Montanus’ call for God’s people to follow the Spirit instead of following Christian ministers was not a weakness; it was his greatest strength, and it appealed to pure hearts.

Chadwick’s view was that believers such as Montanus were “over-enthusiastic” and that they were “hotheads” who provoked Christians to dismiss them as false.³⁰⁴ In only one of those points was Chadwick correct: Montanus certainly did provoke Christians.

Chadwick also added a strange reason for early Christians rejecting Montanus, namely, that when Montanus prophesied, he often said “I”. This, he asserted, showed Montanus to be a false prophet because the Bible’s true prophets gave their prophecies in the third person (“He”), and it was offensive to Christians for a man to prophesy in the first person.³⁰⁵ There is so much clear and contradictory biblical evidence for that theory that it is difficult to imagine anyone proposing it. There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament in which the prophets spoke in the first person, for the prophet was not speaking from himself, but God was speaking through him.³⁰⁶ As the apostle Peter said, “No prophecy in the past came about by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the holy Spirit” (2Pet. 1:21). So, Chadwick’s is an insupportable theory that is not the product of fact, but of his own bias against “demonstration of the Spirit and power” (cf. 1Cor. 2:4).

Christian Ministers

Jerry Falwell was a Baptist pastor, televangelist, and political activist.

The early Christian contempt of Montanus and his “babbling” is echoed by modern Christians and scholars who also reject the “demonstration of the Spirit and power of God” of which Paul spoke (1Cor. 2:4–5), frowning upon the notion that there is any longer a voice that speaks from heaven (Heb. 12:25) as it spoke when the Spirit first came (Acts 2:1–4). Many of them deem those upon whom the Spirit falls as being

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁰⁶ E.g., Judg. 6:8; 1Sam. 2:27; 2Sam. 12:7, 11; Isa. 49:8; et al.

either mentally imbalanced or moved upon by a strange power. One Christian minister sarcastically said of them, “They rant and dance and roll in a disgusting amalgamation of African voodoo superstition and Caucasian insanity, and will pass away like the hysterical nightmares that they are.”³⁰⁷ A less acerbic criticism, though equally disdainful, came from Jerry Falwell, who is quoted as having described those who speak in tongues as “people who ate too much pizza last night.”³⁰⁸ To this day, these “dry, formal, orthodox” types previously mentioned by John Wesley continue to find fault with the kind of worship associated with Montanus, but their reasons for doing so are as strained as are those of their ancient counterparts.

William Tabbernee (1944–)

William Tabbernee was a Distinguished Professor of the History of Christianity before he retired.

As has been shown, the destruction of information which Montanus’ writings would have provided left the door open for Christian leaders to invent all kinds of doctrines for Montanus to have taught and all manner of evils for him and his fellows to have committed. And Christians have taken full advantage of it. The following, admittedly imagined, account of Montanus’ way of prophesying from Tabbernee is downright silly:

Never in their whole lives have the villagers seen anything like this. The man writhing in front of them has changed, within minutes, from the rational, well-respected, leading citizen of their village into a raving madman. Before their very eyes, he has suddenly fallen into a trance, throwing his arms and legs around wildly. His body is twisting in contortions. Drool dribbles from his mouth.

Then, as quickly as the frenzied activity commenced, it stops. The man once again stands upright and almost rigid. Strange sounds are coming from his mouth. He begins to babble incomprehensibly. Simultaneously horrified and fascinated, they watch, not daring to move. What are they to make of all this?

³⁰⁷ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa St. Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2017), 9.

³⁰⁸ Jerry Falwell, quoted in the *Washington Post*, Marjorie Hyer, “Pentecostals Fundamentalists the Backgrounds of Belief”, *Washington Post*, March 28, 1987, 7pm EST, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1987/03/28/pentecostals-fundamentalists-the-backgrounds-of-belief/f1393204-a18b-414b-bc36-7f673b85cca3/>.

Suddenly the man, whose name is Montanus, stops babbling. Still in a trance, he looks intently at the small crowd of people and says audibly and distinctly:

“Behold! A human being is like a lyre and I hover like a plectrum. The human being sleeps but I remain awake. Behold! The Lord is the one who stirs up the hearts of human beings and the one who strikes the heart in human beings.”³⁰⁹

That bizarre scene reveals more about Tabbernee’s colorful imagination than it does about Montanus. It is impossible to believe that such outlandish public conduct would have so impressed multitudes that they would follow Montanus and become imitators of him. Even the early Christians who despised him did not give a sillier description of him. Tabbernee claims that his description of Montanus’ prophetic ecstasy is based on “solid evidence”.³¹⁰ But where is the solid evidence for Montanus flailing about on the ground, drooling from his mouth?

Lastly, Tabbernee wrote that Montanus and those with him “lived and practiced [a] unique form of Christianity.”³¹¹ But Tabbernee wrote that only because he believes, as do virtually all other scholars and historians, that Christianity began with Jesus and that Montanus was part of the Christian Movement. But Montanus would have been indignant at that suggestion. He and his fellows had no part in the Christian Movement and wanted nothing to do with it.

Robert Lane Fox (1946–)

Robert Lane Fox is an English classicist and historian.

Fox may have offered the most absurd criticism of Montanus of all when he said that Montanus taught that the holy Spirit did not come in the book of Acts and that he “argued against the former ‘gifts’ of the Spirit, thus denying the story of Pentecost and the ‘ecstasy’ of John in the book of Revelation.”³¹² That new criticism makes absolutely no sense. If it were true, it would mean that Montanus’ error was that he rejected the very way of worship for which Christians condemned him. Is it not a bizarre theory that Montanus preached against spiritual gifts, Pentecostal

³⁰⁹ Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 11.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

³¹² Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 407.

worship, and ecstatic spiritual experience—the very things for which he was so hated and persecuted?

I was asked by one reader how scholars could justify the invention of new accusations against Montanus, especially strange ones like this. My only thought was that they had earned tenure and, so, enjoyed the privilege of making up stuff with impunity.

Bart Ehrman (1955–)

Bart Ehrman, an agnostic/atheist, is a New Testament scholar and professor at the University of North Carolina.

Ehrman teaches that “the idea that direct revelation from God could take precedence over the written Scriptures led to the condemnation of *Montanus’ message*.”³¹³ That may indeed have been what Montanus taught, and it may have played a role in Christians’ condemnation of him, but there is no evidence to support that theory. There is nothing from Montanus to prove that he taught it, and no ancient adversary of Montanus ever provided credible evidence that he did, though he may well have.

More important, however, is what is missing from Ehrman’s statement, to wit, an acknowledgment that direct revelation from God has *always* taken precedence over the Scriptures, and over everything else besides. Direct revelation from God is the only source of truth that man has ever had. So, if Montanus did teach that revelation from God trumps Scripture, he was right to do so. And if Christians rejected him for teaching that, they were the heretics, not Montanus. It will be beneficial to digress a bit from our list of modern critics of Montanus to pursue this important point.

God May Change; What Is Written Cannot

God is a living God, and the only truth that exists is what He says at any given moment. He explained this to Ezekiel (33:13–16):

When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but then he trusts in his own righteousness and does wrong, none of his righteousness will be remembered, but because of his wrong that he has done, he will die in it. Or when I say to the wicked man, “You shall surely die!” and then he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, . . . he will surely live and not die. None of

³¹³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 254.

his sin which he committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right. He shall live.

God does everything, everyday, “according to the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11), and He may change His will at any time, without regard to Scripture or anything else. The very thing that makes it possible for sinners to obtain mercy from God is that God will change His mind. If God were bound to do according to the Scriptures, King David would have been executed for his two sins, adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband. The God-given Scriptures in David’s day demanded that no mercy be shown, under any circumstances, to an adulterer or a murderer (Lev. 20:10; Ex. 21:14). But did not the revelation to Nathan the prophet, that the guilty king would not have to die (2Sam. 12:13), supersede well-known scriptures to the contrary? What God says today takes precedence over everything, even over what He said in the past. To think otherwise is contrary to everything found in the Bible. From that holy book, we learn what the living God may do by seeing what He has done. And I would be surprised to learn that Montanus taught anything else.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God is perfectly and always free to change His will for man. God once commanded Moses to strike a rock in order to obtain water for the people (Ex. 17:6), but later, He told Moses to speak to a rock instead (Num. 20:8). If the first instance had been written down as Scripture before the second command was given, would not God’s second command have superseded Scripture? For another example, when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, He promised to take them into Canaan’s land (Ex. 3:8), but He later refused to do so when they rebelled against Him (Num. 14:28–32). Did not the later revelation of God’s will supersede what He had earlier promised to do? The Scriptures were given for man’s benefit, not as an instruction manual for God.

The Word of God Versus the Scriptures

Early Christians tried to monopolize God’s grace with rituals³¹⁴ and to reduce Christ to a theological formula; that way, they could control what was said and done by their followers. Christians to this day would have the Bible be the Word of God;³¹⁵ yet, if that be true, the Word of God is

³¹⁴ The Roman Universal Church still teaches that God’s grace is administered to souls through its sacraments.

³¹⁵ See my booklet, *Is the Bible the Word of God?*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

not the Son of God (cf. Rev. 19:11–13), but a thing to be bought and sold in bookstores. When the prophet Amos warned Israel of a coming famine for the word of God, he was not prophesying of a shortage of Bibles; he was saying that God was going to stop speaking to them: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos. 8:11).

Ministers who teach that the Bible is the Word of God have not been sent by Christ to teach that. They are using the Bible as a substitute for His voice. But a book is no substitute for the Word of God, not even the Bible. Jesus did not tell his disciples that he would have a book written that would lead them into all truth; he said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (Jn. 16:13). And there is no truth and no knowledge of God, and no hope of ever having it, without revelation from the Spirit.

John Whale, though opposed to Montanus, perceived that as a result of late second-century Christians’ “deep distrust of the prophetic and charismatic in all its forms, the third century was an age of disillusionment. . . . Enthusiasm was suspect, the priest exalted, prophesying despised and crushed, and the Spirit quenched.”³¹⁶ The Christian religion which developed after that time only grew less and less spiritual and more and more regimented, until the grossly corrupt and godless Medieval Church arose. Concerning that tragic development, Whale wrote,

The institutional and sacramental emphasis of the Medieval Church . . . help obscure the abiding truth that the Spirit alone is primary, and all else, however important, secondary. The Bible, the Sacraments, the historical record of Jesus’ life on earth are all a channel of the Spirit; primary is the experienced fellowship of man’s spirit with the Lord’s Spirit. . . . The entire Medieval system from the Papacy downward is no more than a natural development of the unbelief which knows no working of the Spirit but one transmitted by outward ordinances from a distant past.³¹⁷

Then, Whale added a stunning comment, to wit, that Christians’ rejection of Montanus “gave a greater impulse” to the development of Medieval Christianity than even the conversion of Constantine!³¹⁸ No one

³¹⁶ J.S. Whale, “The Heresies of the Church and Recurring Heresies: Montanus”, *Expository Times* 45, no. 11 (August 1934): 496–500, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001452463404501104>.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

else, to my knowledge, has ever said that, but if it is not altogether true, it is only a slight exaggeration of fact.

The way of Montanus, Whale continued, “is of abiding interest because the issues which it represents are not dead. They are still with a modern Church required to take account of, say, a Group Movement with its . . . confident appeal to the direct guidance of the individual and the group by the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁹ But what the way of Montanus represents is not a “Group Movement”; rather, it represents the determination of God, in every generation, to reward those who diligently seek Him with direct guidance from His Spirit—something the Church has never and can never provide for those who look to it for hope.

The absence of a present word from God, speaking by the Spirit through His servants, is and always has been a grievous thing. Under the law, Solomon said that God’s people go wrong when there is no vision from God (Prov. 29:18). Later, when God withdrew from His rebellious people and sent the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem, the greatest part of the tragedy was that there was no more revelation from God (cf. Lam. 2:9). In that desperate time, the Scriptures, regardless of how holy they are, were worthless to the Israelites because the Scriptures have no power to save. Jesus condemned those who looked to the Bible to save them: “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but they are they which testify of me, and you don’t want to come to me, that you might have life” (Jn. 5:39–40). Just as Israel was destroyed in Jeremiah’s day because they refused to obey God’s word through the prophets, so also in the time of the apostles, they refused to obey God’s word through Paul, clinging to the dead letter of the law instead of living in the light of life (cf. Jn. 8:12).

It broke Paul’s heart to see his Gentile converts turning from life in the Spirit to serve God again in dead ceremonial works, and when Montanus saw it, I believe that it broke his heart as well. Nothing can take the place of being led by the Spirit, for those who are led by the Spirit are alone the children of God (Rom. 8:14). Nobody in this New Covenant is led by the Spirit to worship God with rituals.

Revelation Is an Experience

If what a man says is not revealed to him by Christ, his doctrine is false as far as he actually knows. Paul’s doctrine was revealed to him, and he, therefore, knowing the Source of his doctrine, knew that it was right:

³¹⁹ Ibid.

“I would have you to know, brothers, regarding the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man. For I neither received it from a man, nor was I taught it, but I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11–12).

Everything the Lord Jesus said and did was the result of revelation from the Father. He testified, “My doctrine is not mine, but His who sent me” (Jn. 7:16), and, “of myself, I can do nothing. As I hear, I judge” (Jn. 5:30), and, “I do nothing on my own, but as my Father taught me, I say these things” (Jn. 8:28). When Jesus and Paul preached, they were only confessing what they had learned through an experience of revelation. That is why Jesus could truthfully say, “If you do not believe that I am the one, you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24), and Paul could blamelessly pray that the men who were teaching his converts a different doctrine would be damned (Gal. 5:12).

Genuine Spiritual Authority

When a man has an experience of revelation from God, the words he then speaks carry an authority that is beyond the man himself. His words are not philosophical, but simple and sure. Listeners can understand them and feel the difference between them and the practiced words of professional religionists, as they did when Jesus spoke: “The multitudes were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one with authority, and not as the scribes” (Mt. 7:28–29). It was with that same authority that Paul said to the Galatians, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, bring you a gospel contrary to the gospel we preached to you, let him be cursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone brings you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be cursed!” (Gal. 1:8–9).

According to Paul, then, any minister who teaches a doctrine different from Paul’s is cursed, and he is spreading that curse to whoever believes him. And how many ministers teach doctrines contrary to Paul’s! Only by faith can we believe that it does not matter how many thousands of such ministers there are; numbers influence man’s judgment, never God’s. The curse which Paul called down upon false teachers applies to however many false teachers there are.

Christianity’s very name is a lie. It has nothing to do with Christ. Paul said that anyone, in heaven or earth, who dared teach a gospel different from his was cursed, and beneath the umbrella of Christianity are many such gospels. Therefore, the rightful name of Christianity is not *Christianity*, but *Cursedianity*. Instead of the typical question, “Which

church do you belong to?” the real question is, “Which *curse* do you belong to?”

That sounds a little odd, but Jesus, and both Montanus and Paul, would say amen.

Online Sources

The online Encyclopaedia Britannica, for one of a great many examples, also repeats as fact a few of the old slanders leveled against Montanus:³²⁰

- “Before his conversion . . . , he apparently was a priest of the Oriental ecstatic cult of Cybele, a mother goddess of fertility.”
- Montanus and those with him “exhibited the frenzied nature of their religious experience by enraptured seizures and utterances of strange languages that the disciples regarded as oracles of the Holy Spirit.”
- Montanus was “convinced that the end of the world was at hand and that the New Jerusalem mentioned in the New Testament was about to descend near the Phrygian village of Pepuza.”
- Montanus “laid down a rigoristic morality to purify his followers and detach them from their material desires.”
- Montanus and those with him “at first expected an imminent transformation of the world, but later evolved into sectarianism claiming a new revelation.”
- The Phrygian blessing was “a schismatic movement founded by the prophet Montanus that arose in the Christian *community*^b.”

This article makes no mention of the complete absence of credible evidence for those accusations. Worse yet, undeterred by the lack of evidence, the editors of Britannica added a theory of their own. They apparently thought it remarkable that “despite *Christian leaders*^b official disapproval of *the way of Montanus*^e as a heretical sect, the excommunication of *their*^e leaders, and the failure of the world to come to an end, the *the way of Montanus*^e survived.”³²¹ It is altogether a new accusation that Montanus needed the world to come to an end in order for the gospel he preached to survive. As with hundreds, if not thousands, of other online

³²⁰ Britannica, Editors of Encyclopaedia, “*Montanus*”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, date accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Montanus-religious-leader>.

³²¹ Ibid.

articles about Montanus, Britannica's evidence against him is nothing but a repeat of old slanders, with modern imagination added.

According to Wikipedia, an online source trusted by millions, Montanus was “a self-proclaimed prophet” who founded a Christian movement and who “used to be a pagan priest, but converted into *the Christian religion*.”³²² But that Montanus was a “self-proclaimed prophet” is an opinion, not a historical fact, and there was certainly nothing Christian about him; that was the religion he detested. According to another popular source, the two prophetesses, Maximilla and Prisca, “had been married, left their husbands, and were given by Montanus the rank of virgins in the church,”³²³ even though it has never been shown that those women were married, or divorced, or that they were ever given any rank by anyone other than God.

And thus, the slanderous assault on Montanus' character is perpetuated by modern online sources.

The Kundalini Spirit

A modern slander against Montanus-style worship that has recently come into vogue is the accusation of those who are moved by the Spirit as being under “the Kundalini spirit”. *Kundalini* is a term from the Hindu religion, referring to a supposed power, latent in the human body, that can be conjured up. During a “Kundalini awakening”, Hindus have been known to shake, among other things. Some see such psychotic experiences as demonic possession, and in some cases, they may well be right. But they are wrong who accuse Spirit-filled believers of being under the Kundalini spirit.³²⁴ If Asterius, Epiphanius, or Eusebius had known of “the Kundalini awakening”, they would certainly have included that in their long list of accusations against Montanus.

Scholarly Disagreements

Where voids exist in the historical record, scholars' theories will always abound, as we saw in Book 4 in this Series concerning the supposed fall of Rome. So, as one might expect, scholarly hypotheses concerning Montanus and the saints with him vary greatly. Robert Turcan

³²² Wikipedia, “Montanus”, date accessed February 29, 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montanus>.

³²³ “Montanus”, Dictionary of Christian Biography, Henry Wace, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wace/biodict.toc.html?term=montanus>.

³²⁴ Cf. “What is the kundalini spirit?”, Got Questions Your Questions. Biblical Answers, last modified January 4, 2022, <https://www.gotquestions.org/kundalini-spirit.html>.

(1929–2018) taught that “their fasts and hallucinatory ecstasies were somewhat akin to Cybele Mother-cult practices.”³²⁵ Dodd taught exactly the opposite: “It does not appear that his prophecy owed much to his Phrygian origins [where the Cybele Mother-cult originated].”³²⁶ “[Rather,] *the faith of Montanus*^e grew out of the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic tradition.”³²⁷

To his credit, Robert Grant recognized that Montanus was denouncing the drift of second-century believers toward Greco-Roman culture.³²⁸ That characterization of Montanus’ message rings true because it is reminiscent of Paul’s denunciation of first-century believers who had drifted toward Moses’ law: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth? This only would I learn of you. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by the preaching of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in spirit, are you now perfected by flesh?” (Gal. 3:1–3). That, in essence, was Montanus’ cry to second-century believers. But while Grant heard in the sayings of Montanus a voice pleading with wayward children of God, Peter Brown heard in those same utterances “a fussy and old-fashioned martinet, ministering to the anxieties of small, puritanical groups.”³²⁹

As I suggested in the beginning, one’s judgments are shaped by personal experience; they are altogether a matter of the heart. Anyone’s judgment of Montanus is necessarily a reflection of his biases more than of the facts. Men are divided in their assessment of Montanus because their experiences differ, and it can be no other way for any of us. For the most part, modern historians and scholars have had no experiences with Christ which would cause them to question the ancient slanders; it is less problematic and more acceptable for them just to repeat those slanders and move on.

Slander

Slander against God’s true servants is as old as the story of salvation. Moses and the prophets of old were slandered almost from the moment they first spoke the word of God. Some believers slandered the apostle Paul, twisting his gospel of grace to mean that believers ought to sin more

³²⁵ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), 45.

³²⁶ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 63.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63n2.

³²⁸ Grant, R. M., *Augustus to Constantine*, 133.

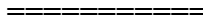
³²⁹ Brown, P., *Making of Late Antiquity*, 67–68.

often so that they could receive more grace from God. Damnation, Paul said, would be their just reward (Rom. 3:8). Peter, although commissioned by God to preach a gospel to the Jews which differed from Paul's gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7), recognized that Paul was slandered by some believers because they did not understand his revelation (2Pet. 3:15–16):

Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul has also written to you according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all his letters when speaking in them about these matters, among which are some things hard to understand, which those who are ignorant and unstable twist to their own damnation, as they also do the other scriptures.

If Paul's letters were hard to understand in his own day, as Peter said, they were impossible for second-century believers to understand who were developing their own version of the gospel. The spiritual blindness which emboldened first-century Apostates to reject Paul also emboldened second-century Apostates to reject Montanus. Those early Christian leaders who did not understand Paul's gospel and condemned Montanus sinned against Christ by doing so. Likewise, modern critics who do not understand Paul's gospel carry on that ancient abuse of Montanus and, by that, are guilty of the same Christian sin.

It is important to keep in mind what the basis is for all commentary on Montanus. Over the centuries, thousands of literary works have been produced by Christians and scholars concerning Montanus and his faith, and the historical basis for every single one of them, including this book, is a handful of utterances made by Montanus and those with him. Nothing else from his time exists, and nothing from the centuries immediately after him exists except hysterical criticisms of Montanus by Christian leaders. That is the complete historical record upon which has been based every single judgment of Montanus for the past 1,800 years. It is altogether a matter of the heart.



Remember

- Never in the history of God's people has there been for them "a desperate need for unity" with something evil.
- Direct revelation from God takes precedence over the Scriptures, and over everything else besides.

- Direct revelation from God is the only source of truth that man has ever had.
- God is a living God, and the only truth that exists is what He says at any given moment.
- The very thing that makes it possible for sinners to obtain mercy from God is that God will change His mind.
- What God says today takes precedence over everything, even over what He said in the past.
- From the Bible, we learn what the living God may do by seeing what He has done.
- The Scriptures were given for man's benefit, not as an instruction manual for God.
- Early Christians tried to monopolize God's grace with rituals and to reduce Christ to a theological formula.
- No book is a substitute for the Word of God, not even the Bible.
- The absence of a present word from God is and always has been a grievous thing.
- Nothing can take the place of being led by the Spirit, for those who are led by the Spirit are alone the children of God.
- Nobody in this New Covenant is led by the Spirit to worship God with rituals.
- If what a man says is not revealed to him by Christ, his doctrine is false as far as he actually knows.
- Everything the Lord Jesus said and did was the result of revelation from the Father.
- When a man has an experience of revelation from God, the words he then speaks carry an authority that is beyond the man himself.
- Any minister who teaches a doctrine different from Paul's is cursed, and he is spreading that curse to whoever believes him.
- It does not matter how many thousands of false prophets there are; numbers influence man's judgment, never God's.
- Christianity's very name is a lie. It has nothing to do with Christ.
- The rightful name of Christianity is not *Christianity*, but *Cursedianity*.
- Where voids exist in the historical record, scholars' theories will always abound.
- Montanus' call for God's people to follow the Spirit instead of following Christian ministers was not a weakness; it was his greatest strength, and it appealed to pure hearts.
- God's word and power do not go out of style.

- By the mid-second century, those who called themselves Christians had drifted so far from the truth that the original way of New Testament worship seemed odd to them when they saw it.
- Slander against God's true servants is as old as the story of salvation.
- If Paul's letters were hard to understand in his own day, as Peter said, they were impossible for second-century apostate believers to understand.
- The spiritual blindness which emboldened first-century Apostates to reject Paul also emboldened second-century Apostates to reject Montanus.
- The early Christian leaders who did not understand Paul's gospel and condemned Montanus sinned against Christ by doing so.
- Modern critics who do not understand Paul forward the early Christian abuse of Montanus, and they are forwarding that old Christian sin.

Chapter Six

*Cursedianity*³³⁰

The Straw Man

In 1976, I was walking across my seminary's campus when all of a sudden before me appeared a vision of a mighty Roman military figure whose height reached to the clouds, and everything about him exuded supreme confidence. His face was stern, and he looked straight ahead, over and beyond me, as if I was nothing. My first reaction was awe, but then I noticed something that took away the intimidation: other than his military gear, he was made entirely of straw!

Immediately, I understood that the straw man conquered only by his appearance and that intimidation was his only weapon. I also understood that the straw represented the reliance of scholars and clerics on one another rather than on revelation from God. Each strand of straw represented something that a scholar or minister said and that another repeated. That was the weaving; the warrior was constructed, head to toe, by interweaving those straws together. It came to mind as I stood there that in the research papers required for my classes, almost nothing was considered legitimate unless it could be footnoted. To have credibility, everything we students wrote must have already been said, in some way, by a recognized scholar or theologian. Absolutely no room was left for revelation from God. For anyone to say, "Thus says the Lord", was to receive a failing grade.

There was nothing at all for me to fear from the massive straw warrior; he was nothing to be accounted of, in spite of all the majesty and authority that he at first presented. One tiny spark, I knew, would burn him up. One tiny spark! And that tiny spark was any word, experience, or thought from God. If any believer truly received something from God, that straw man would hate him and influence his ministers to destroy him so that the flame would be extinguished. *Anything* from God, no matter how small, is a terror to that giant straw warrior.

³³⁰ Title suggested by Amy French.

So, be warned. If you hear from God and are bold enough to confess what He has shown you, you should be prepared for a vicious response from those who are woven into the straw man, for it will certainly come. Montanus suffered it because Christians sensed that the religion they were devising could not survive the fire of the holy Ghost which burned within him.

Revelation of the Straw Man

Paul saw the straw when it began to be woven together, and he pleaded with God's children not to be part of it. Nevertheless, they joined in, and in time, with Rome's help, the straw mounted up to heaven in the figure of a fearsome warrior. But he is a lie, and God's servants who see it are slandered bitterly by the straw man as the worst of the worst, for God "makes His ministers a fiery flame" (Heb. 1:7), and they echo the plea of the Father to His children to come away from the straw man so that God can set it on fire: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues!" (Rev. 18:4).

With the vision of the straw man, the Lord was strengthening me in the Spirit so that I would not be impressed with or intimidated by the Roman giant. Even at that, however, it was only in 1993, about 17 years later, that the Lord gave me the full understanding of my vision. I had thought that the straw man represented the perversion of the Faith of Jesus, and seeing him strengthened my resolve to restore the original, pure Christianity that I thought Jesus had started. But in 1993, I saw that the imposing warrior made of straw was the *religion of Christianity itself!* Up until that point, I believed with everyone else that Christianity originated with Jesus and the apostles and that it had been pure in the beginning but that false teachers corrupted it. But the truth is that Christianity originated with Constantine; it has never been pure, and never will be. God's children who are in it, trying to make it what they think it ought to be, as I did for so long, are wasting their lives. If you are one of them, come out! Christianity has never been of God.

It is the Faith of Christ that Paul preached which was pure, and it still is, and that is the Faith which first-century believers abandoned. By the early-second century, that Faith was already a foreign thing to those who called themselves Christians. Then came Montanus, a blazing fire, to whom the Faith was not foreign at all, but precious, and the men constructing that straw man hated him.

God Must Both Speak and Reveal

I spent eighteen years of my life after seeing the vision of the mighty straw man defending the very thing that God had shown me was nothing; I just had not understood the vision. But failing to grasp what God means when He speaks is by no means an experience particular to me. Through the ages, God has spoken to many people who only later perceived His meaning. None of the Old Testament prophets understood what God meant when He spoke through them of His Son (1Pet. 1:10–11). In our time, on August 19, 1972, at a worldwide gathering of the Church of God sect in Dallas, TX, the Spirit gave to the whole assembly a message in tongues, with the interpretation. That message was no doubt misunderstood by everyone there, including the sect's leaders who recorded that holy message in their official record. According to that record, God first made it clear who His intended audience was: "My Spirit has been placed within thee. Yea, you are my people, and I shall dwell in you, and I shall work in you, and I shall call you my people." Then God gave the following directive to those who had the Spirit: "Come ye out from among them and touch not the unclean thing, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, and I will receive you, saith the Lord of Israel."³³¹ What the Father was calling for those with His Spirit to do was to come out of the religion of Christianity, which included the Church of God sect, as well as all other Christian sects. But who in Dallas that day even imagined such a thing? Nobody, unless God gave them understanding after they heard His voice.

For many who heard Montanus and his fellow ministers, God must have opened the ears of their understanding, for the critics spoke of multitudes who believed them. Many others heard Montanus, and his words seemed wrong to them. The only explanation for that difference is that God gave the understanding to some and not to others, as Jesus once told his disciples when they asked him why he spoke to people in parables: "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to those, it is not given. . . . And in them is Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled which says, 'You shall hear, but you will not understand, and you shall see, but you will not perceive'" (Mt. 13:11, 14; cf. Isa. 6:9–10). If we understand anything God has ever said, it is only because He has given it to us, and we owe Him praise for it.

If the meaning of God's word is not revealed after it is spoken, it will remain a mystery. He must help us to understand what He says. Without

³³¹ *The 54th General Assembly of the Church of God 1972 Minutes*, (Cleveland TN: Church of God Publishing House), 48.

understanding, the hearing of God's word or the seeing of a vision will bear no fruit. People all over the earth see the heavens every day without understanding that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). But only some see that glorious truth because only to some has it been given to see it.

In 2007, during a phone conversation with a saint who lived in another state, the Spirit came upon her, and the Lord spoke to me through her. I believed that the direction she gave me was from Jesus, but afterward, I did exactly the opposite of what the Lord had commanded because I did not wait for a right understanding of what she had said. I suffered for that error, but I learned from the experience. One truth I learned is that it is only of the mercies of God that anyone ever understands and does what is right.

Montanus and those with him labored to persuade God's people to live and worship in the Spirit and, so, to escape the bondage of human opinions and dead works. Those who believed their message were blessed to do so, and those who did not believe them were cursed to continue formulating their own religion.

God's Help

Among academics, although no genuine historical facts provide justification for condemning Montanus, the slander refuses to die. The pitiless power of peer pressure, or that of religious tradition, blurs the vision of even the most accomplished scholars, compelling them to join the chorus of other experts denouncing Montanus and to perpetuate the agreed-upon myths surrounding him.

For all the knowledge which Church historians possess—and they possess much and are to be respected for that—I have found among them no one who perceives Montanus' true significance. That understanding has to come from God, and judging by the works of historians which I have read, either God has not spoken to them or they have not understood Him when He did. Were it but a few undistinguished scholars making derogatory statements about Montanus, the accusations might be dismissed as the product of unknowledgeable minds. But the vast majority of accomplished experts in this field make those statements, and they do so only because their great knowledge is befogged by a power which renders their intellect useless in knowing the truth. It is for them as the apostle Paul said: they are “always learning, and yet, never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2Tim. 3:7).

As a rule, scholars scoff at reliance on divine guidance in academic research; however, in the light of the confused and divided opinions of those experts, what recourse remains for those who want the truth? Even an unlearned man can see that without God's guidance, the most knowledgeable of scholars are lost in a dank swamp of ideas, and they can only guess which path leads out of it. The experts would be wise to kneel at Jesus' feet and ask for his help, for only he can rightly fit together the many facts which they know so well.

A Temporary Hatred

Dead men of God are often honored by Christians; it is the living men of God who give them problems. That such virulent hatred and slander of Montanus has continued for almost two thousand years is remarkable in that it stands in stark contrast to how servants of God are usually treated after their death. In a gospel tract my father wrote over half a century ago, he pointed out the hypocrisy:

Many in Israel who persecuted the prophets praised Moses while they did so. Then, the religionists of Jesus' time praised Moses and the prophets but persecuted Jesus and his apostles. During the early days of the Popes, many Christians praised Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, but persecuted God's living saints. And many now praise the patriarchs, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, and the martyrs but persecute all who stand for like faith today.³³²

Such is the undeniable history of God's unwise children. With a parable, Jesus pointed out that sad reality (Mt. 21:33–39):

There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, and he hedged it all around, and dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower, and leased it to vinedressers, and then went on a journey. Now, when the season for the fruit was at hand, he sent his servants to the tenants to receive his fruit. And the vine-dressers seized his servants; one they beat, and one they killed, and one they stoned. Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they treated them the same way. Then, finally, he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But the vine-dressers, seeing the son, said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come

³³² See the gospel tract, "Alone with God", available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

on! Let's kill him and seize his inheritance!" And they seized him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Through the ages, then, as Jesus made clear, it has been typical for faithful servants of God to be abused by the unwise among God's people, but often the hatred dissipates after God's servants die. Alive, they are despised; dead, they are useful. I witnessed an instance of this.

Sister Seaver

I once met and grew close to an aged saint in my hometown, a Sister Seaver. During my visits in her home, we shared sweet, memorable times in the Lord. In the early 1900s, she was a founding member of a local Pentecostal church. She told me her story of "takin' in washin'", that is, washing neighbors' clothes by hand on an old washboard in order to earn an extra dime a week to contribute to the building fund.

Her humble home was not very far from the church that was eventually built; however, she did not drive, and she was now too feeble to walk that far. But no member of that church, no relative, and no church official would respond to her requests to be given a ride to church meetings. They all knew (because she let them know, as she did me and others) that if she went, she would reprove the entire congregation for their worldliness, and she would have been right to do so. Years before, as a teenager, I had been a member of that church, and so I knew many of its members well. The errors she was seeing were real, and as a godly elder, her feelings and thoughts would have benefitted them if she had been given an opportunity to express them. But at no time in her last years was she allowed to attend their church meetings, lest she testify about what she saw.

When this precious, aged saint died, I made the 120-mile trip from my home to be at her funeral, which was attended by many people. I sat near the back of the crowded church, and when the funeral began, the scene before me nearly took my breath. Some of the same people who had for so long refused to bring this dear mother in Christ into their church while she was alive were praising her to the highest. I heard them telling stories about her, including her labor to help start that church. Had I not known better, I would have thought that she all but lived in that building and did little else but work for its success. Before the funeral service even began, two middle-aged men sat in the pew in front of me boasting aloud about their connections with the dead saint. The first man was one I knew; he was a part-time minister who had grown up in that congregation. He spoke in glowing terms of how Sister Seaver had helped him and his wife

when they first married. The other man responded with his own story, claiming with evident pride that when he was an infant, Sister Seaver had nursed him from her own breasts when his mother was sick.

It was a heartrending scene. Now that the old woman was dead, she was useful. Now, with her voice stilled, she was allowed into the building. Suddenly, to have been close to her was a mark of distinction, a distinction for which people vied with competing stories. After that, many other accolades were heaped upon her, once the funeral began. My heart was broken, and I could not stay. When the pastor of the church had everyone bow their heads in prayer, I quietly left the building and traveled back home.

That is how dead servants of God are typically used by Christians to promote their religion. Adolph Hitler did that sort of thing with General Erwin Rommel's corpse, giving him a grand State funeral so that the German people would think of Rommel as a hero of Nazism. They did not know that Hitler had forced Rommel to commit suicide for participating in a plot to assassinate him. Had Rommel ever spoken out publicly against Hitler, he would never have been given such a grand send-off. And had Sister Seaver ever been allowed to speak her mind to that congregation, it is unlikely that she would have been given such a grand send-off, either, leaving the impression that she approved of the path they had taken. But as it was, Rommel's opposition to Hitler was kept quiet, and Sister Seaver was kept away until she could no longer speak.

The remarkable difference in the case of Montanus is that, unlike Rommel and Sister Seaver, he made his voice heard to such an extent that when he died, Christians could not use his dead body to promote their religion. Their hatred of him did not turn to love. It couldn't, for while living, he had made it crystal clear to everyone that believers had fallen into an appalling apostasy and that he had no part in it at all. Just as the Apostates' Christian Movement was an abomination to Montanus, so was Montanus an abomination to the Apostates. They abhorred with a venomous hatred everything about Montanus, even his dead body; that is why Christians in the fifth century exhumed and burned up what was left of it.

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Remember

- If you hear from God and are bold enough to confess what He has shown you, you should be prepared for a vicious response.
- Christianity has never been pure, and never will be.
- Christianity has never been of God.

- By the early-second century, the Faith taught by Paul was already a foreign thing to those who called themselves Christians.
- The Father is calling for those with His Spirit to come out of the religion of Christianity.
- If we understand anything God has ever said, it is only because He has given it to us, and we owe Him praise for it.
- If the meaning of God's word is not revealed after it is spoken, it will remain a mystery. He must help us to understand what He says.
- It is only of the mercies of God that anyone ever understands and does what is right.
- Montanus labored to persuade God's people to live and worship in the Spirit.
- Dead men of God are often honored by Christians; it is the living men of God who give them problems.
- It is typical for faithful servants of God to be abused—until after they are dead. Alive, they are despised; dead, they are useful.
- Just as the Apostates' Christian Movement was an abomination to Montanus, so was Montanus an abomination to the Apostates.

CONCLUSION

Is Christ Divided?

At the close of the apostolic age, so miserable was the spiritual condition of believers that some of them even refused to allow Jesus' apostles to enter their meetings. John mentioned one of them by name, saying, "Diotrephes, who likes to be chief among them, does not receive us" (3Jn. 1:9). John was grieved that such men were acting as ministers among the saints, and it is instructive for us that John made it plain where those false apostles came from. He said, "They went out from us" (1Jn. 2:19a). And Jude said that the doctrines of those false teachers had caused some of God's children to forget that without obedience to God, they would not be saved: "I want to remind you," he wrote, "though you once knew this, that the LORD, after He saved a people out of Egypt, later destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 1:5). Paul said that those false teachers claimed to be ordained by Christ as ministers of righteousness (2Cor. 11:13, 15), and understandably so, for otherwise, they would have fooled no one.

By the end of his life, Paul understood by revelation that the believers who rejected his gospel would at some point begin to teach conflicting doctrines. He wrote to Timothy, "The time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up teachers for themselves [i.e., hire ministers] according to their own desires, having itching ears, and they will turn away from hearing the truth, and be turned over to myths" (2Tim. 4:3–4). The multitude of apostate teachers that arose in the second century, proclaiming conflicting doctrines and differing rituals, testifies to the veracity of Paul's prophecy.

In his first letter to the saints in Corinth, Paul rebuked them for forming religious clubs and naming their clubs after servants of God: "It has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I am of Paul'; 'I am of Apollos'; 'I am of Peter'; 'I am of Christ'" (1Cor. 1:11–12). Modern equivalents of this would be Christian churches named after Peter (i.e., St. Peter's Basilica) or Paul (i.e., St. Paul's Church) or even after Christ (i.e., the Church of Christ). One might think that Paul would have commended those who named their

club after Christ, but not so; he condemned them all, asking indignantly, “Is Christ divided?” (1Cor. 1:13). Paul knew different clubs would lead to different, conflicting gospels, and it is obvious that the Jesus proclaimed by one gospel cannot be the Jesus proclaimed by a contrary one. The one true Jesus is proclaimed only by the one true gospel, and Paul preached it. Christ is not divided!

“The Spirit That Speaks by Montanus”

The Faith of Christ is one because the God who gave it to him is not confused. With the multitude of Christian doctrines, the situation among believers became the same as it was among Pagans, with their “many gods and many lords”, and it remains that way to our time. The Jesus and God that are proclaimed by Baptists cannot be the Jesus and God proclaimed by Methodists; the Jesus and God of Catholics cannot be the Jesus and God of Presbyterians; and the Jesus and God of Pentecostals cannot be the Jesus and God of Lutherans, and so forth. A different Jesus and a different God are taught by every different Christian sect, and none of them are true because none of them are the Jesus and God whom Paul preached. Differing doctrines about God cannot proceed from the mouth of the one Lord Jesus.

Every doctrine, whether it be true or false, comes from an unseen source, and because there is but one true God, there is only one true Faith (cf. Eph. 4:4–6). Every gospel other than that one has come from a cursed spirit, and that is why Paul said that any man who teaches such a gospel is cursed along with the spirit it came from.

A century after Montanus, the Christian bishop Firmilian wrote a letter in which he said, rightly, that believers like Montanus were not serving the Christian god, or the Christian Jesus, or the Christian holy Spirit: “They who are called Cataphrygians, and who endeavor to claim to themselves new prophecies, can have neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. . . . If we ask what Christ they announce, they will reply that they preach Him who sent the Spirit that speaks by Montanus and Prisca.”³³³ Firmilian was right, and so were the saints who answered him: the Spirit-filled saints in Phrygia *were* preaching the Jesus that Montanus preached, and *that* Jesus was not the Jesus that Christians believed in.

³³³ Cyprian, *Cyprian to Pompeius*, Epistle LXXIV.7, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 5, *Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. First published New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 392.

In 325 when the emperor Constantine selected a Jesus from among the many that Christians taught at that time, he wanted everyone to believe in that Jesus so that he would have unity in his Empire. To that end, Rome began imposing upon all people its version of the gospel. That Rome-approved version of Jesus prevailed for well over a thousand years, until the Reformation and the Enlightenment loosened the iron grip of the Roman Universal Church, and men began offering new versions of God, Jesus, and the Spirit. But the prophets and apostles which each Protestant sect proclaimed were different not only from those of the Roman Church, but also from one another, for each sect claimed that the prophets and apostles taught that sect's doctrine. Thus, the ancient pagan tradition of honoring "many gods and many lords" continued.

Christianity is nothing but ancient paganism rechristened with new names. Rome had its Jupiter, Juno, and Mars, etc.; Christians have their Catholic Jesus, Baptist Jesus, Methodist Jesus, and many, many more. At last count, there were over 45,000 Christian sects in the world.³³⁴ In the ancient world, there was a god for everybody; you just picked the one(s) you liked. And in Christianity, that tradition continues. As the popular saying goes, "Join the church of your choice." "Yet, for us," Paul wrote, "there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him, and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist by him" (1Cor. 8:6). Amen.

Power

The transformation of Rome from an empire primarily of the body to an empire primarily of the soul, and from an empire sustained primarily by military might to an empire sustained primarily by religious indoctrination, was so cunningly accomplished that it has escaped human comprehension. Though historians have given an enormous amount of attention to the events surrounding that transformation, without revelation from God, they remain unenlightened as to the truth of the matter, for the nature of the event is essentially spiritual, and it does not yield itself to academic analysis. Its profound significance is perceived only with aid from God, as Paul said about spiritual matters: "A natural man . . . cannot comprehend them because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor. 2:14).

Some, like professor and archaeologist Judith Herrin (1942–), fail to recognize the very great power over men which was wielded by the

³³⁴ "Why Does Christianity Have So Many Denominations?", Life Science, Donavyn Coffey, date accessed February 20, 2024, <https://www.livescience.com/christianity-denominations.html>.

Christian Empire that Rome became. Her position is that Rome did not survive because “spiritual unity could not compensate for the disappearance of empire.”³³⁵ But the seeming disappearance of the empire was the cunning work of Rome’s genius, for it “disappeared” by wrapping itself in clerical robes and rechristening its gods with the names of apostles and other saints. The unity which Christianity imposed on mankind did not have to “compensate for the disappearance of empire” because there was nothing to compensate for; the empire had gone nowhere. Indeed, the gospel which Constantine and the Apostates invented provided Rome with an even greater control over people than it previously possessed, a power which made men more eager than ever to belong to Rome (the Church), more zealous than ever to promote Roman culture (Church traditions), and prouder than ever to be thought of as Roman (Christian).

For centuries before the Synthesis, as Book 4 of this Series showed, Rome certainly exercised a mysterious power over men, but in the Synthesis, that power was perfected. Said Gibbon of ancient Rome, “Vanquished nations blended into one great people, resigned the hope, nay even the wish, of resuming their independence, and scarcely considered their own existence as distinct from the existence of Rome.”³³⁶ How much more does that description apply to the willing submission of souls worldwide to Christianity! Of the apostate body of believers after it blended with Rome, Belloc rightly said that it had risen “from a small but definite and very tenacious organization within the Empire . . . to be the cohesive political principle of the great majority of human beings.”³³⁷ Belloc clearly saw that the Roman Universal Church was the soul of Western civilization.³³⁸

Divisions and Conflicts

Some historians, such as Herrin, are wont to argue that the many divisions and conflicts which characterize Christian history are evidence that it did not have what was needed to maintain the dominion which Rome once enjoyed. But those conflicts, though at times bitter, are only a continuation of the divisions and conflicts that characterized Rome. Through them all, ancient Rome maintained an overarching authority

³³⁵ Judith Herrin, *Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 134.

³³⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1:50.

³³⁷ Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*, 87.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

which all sides acknowledged, regardless of how the combatants felt toward each other. Robert Payne wrote, “To the mass of Romans, the occasional murders in the imperial palace, the sporadic uprisings in Britain, Gaul, or Africa, and the revolts of the Jews were little more than ripples on the surface of a peaceful lake.”³³⁹ Rome endured in spite of the conflicts because all the combatants saw themselves as Roman, even when the conflicts were vicious. In the century before Jesus’ birth, the Roman Republic suffered so many instances of bloody political violence that they can hardly be counted, but Rome survived. Far from losing face, Rome remained appealing to men, and it was the same with Rome’s transformation into a spiritual Empire in 325. The many divisions and doctrinal controversies within Christianity since 325 have not and cannot bring Christianity to its knees, for regardless of who wins, Christianity still reigns because all the combatants are Christians. Christianity possesses the strength of Rome because it is Rome, called by a different name.

Institutionalized Slander

The first book in this Series explained slander, what it is and how it works. That book is helpful in understanding that when Christianity was established and imposed upon men by Roman might, it became what I call “institutionalized slander”. By that phrase, I mean that when the lie of Christianity is the established norm in society, its very existence is slander against the truth, for society, trusting it, then condemns the truth *merely because it is not Christianity*. When a lie becomes the norm, normal people become liars, for when a lie becomes the norm, truth is condemned simply because it is not the lie.

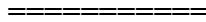
The Apostates grossly and loudly slandered Montanus, but they felt they had to do so, in large part, because the Christian Movement had not yet become standard in society. With the institutionalization of Christianity as society’s standard, its ministers could condemn Montanus without a word, appearing to be above it all; they needed only to maintain the appearance of Christian sanctity, for then, people would dismiss any man of God who was not like them. To be Christ-like appears evil in the eyes of those whose norm is to be Christian-like.

Jesus taught me when I was young in the Faith that the closer a thing comes to being true without being true, the more evil it is, for by its proximity to the truth, it can deceive more people. By that measure,

³³⁹ Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 182.

Christianity is more evil and dangerous than Islam, Buddhism, and other world religions because it seduces souls with a false gospel in the name of the true Lord. Christianity uses holy Scripture, as Satan did in the wilderness Temptation, but its spirit is false because it is his.

As I said previously, Christianity's very name is a lie. It has nothing to do with Christ. And because anyone who dares teach a gospel different from Paul's is cursed, the rightful name of Christianity is not *Christianity*, but *Cursedianity*.



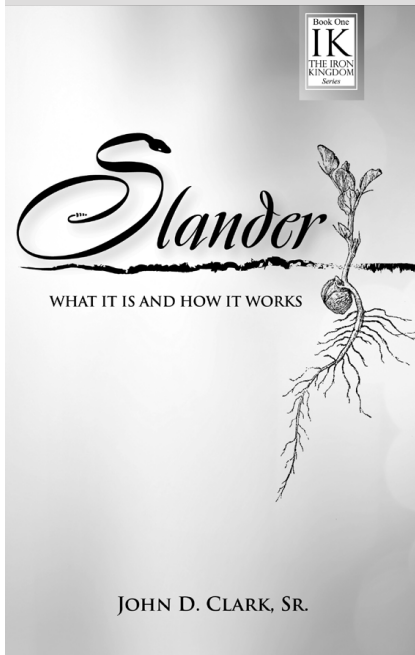
Remember

- The Jesus proclaimed by one gospel cannot be the Jesus proclaimed by a contrary one.
- The one true Jesus is proclaimed only by the one true gospel, and Paul preached it.
- The Faith of Christ is one because the God who gave it to him is not confused.
- A different Jesus and a different God are taught by every different Christian sect, and none of them are true because none of them are the Jesus and God whom Paul preached.
- Differing doctrines cannot proceed from the one Lord Jesus.
- Every gospel other than the true one comes from a cursed spirit, and that is why Paul said that any man who teaches such a gospel is cursed along with the spirit it came from.
- Christianity is nothing but ancient paganism rechristened with new names.
- The unity which Christianity imposed on mankind did not have to compensate for the disappearance of the empire because there was nothing to compensate for; the empire had gone nowhere.
- Christianity possesses the strength of Rome because it is Rome, called by a different name.
- When a lie becomes the norm, normal people become liars, for when a lie becomes the norm, truth is condemned simply because it is not the lie.
- To be Christ-like appears evil in the eyes of those whose norm is to be Christian-like.
- The closer a thing comes to being true without being true, the more evil it is, for by its proximity to the truth, it can deceive more people.
- Christianity uses holy Scripture, as Satan did in the wilderness Temptation, but its spirit is false because it is his.

Afterword

It has not been my intention to gratuitously disparage anyone, but to enlighten the Reader as to the emptiness of the many slanders, ancient and modern, leveled against Montanus. Nor has it been my primary goal to expose Christianity as the fraud that it is, but to inspire Readers to give themselves to the way of life for which Jesus really suffered and died. It was impossible for me to do the latter without doing the former; still, it is much more important to know what the truth is than to know what it is not. To walk in the Spirit is to be a child of God, and for His children to worship Him in spirit and in truth is His desire. Let it be ours as well. Learning to do that is to grow up in Christ, and my sincere prayer is that God will grant us all the grace to do just that.

What Is Slander and How Does It Work?



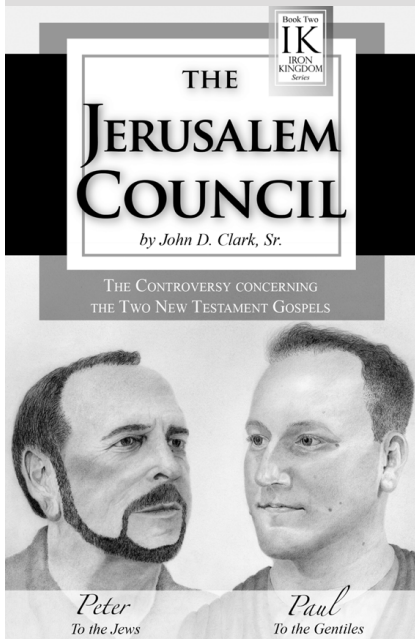
“He who hides hatred with lying lips, and he who utters slander, is a fool.”

The writers of the Bible understood slander in ways that modern dictionaries do not capture. A dictionary will tell you that to slander means “to make a false spoken statement that damages a person’s reputation.”

Biblical stories of slander reveal that slander can be verbal or non-verbal and that slander often uses truth to accomplish its purpose. Slander, as found in Scripture, is a most effective tool of unclean spirits; it has a very high success rate both in the world and in the body of Christ.

Slander, book one in The Iron Kingdom series, lays the foundation needed to understand slander in its most perfect form: the religious system called Christianity.

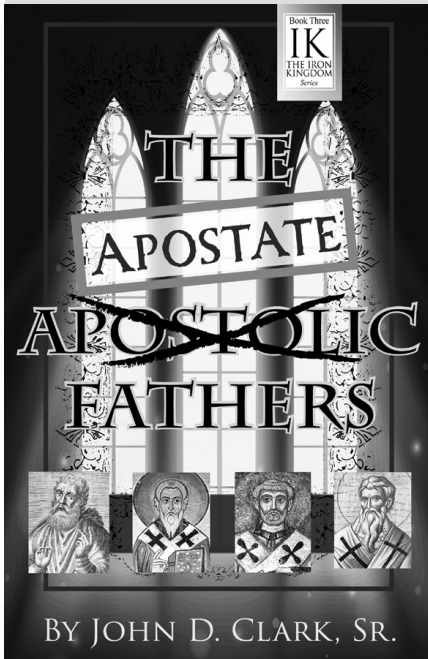
Jesus Alone Can Save.



The aged apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “All they in Asia have forsaken me.” And such was the case in the Assemblies of God everywhere, for before the apostles died, the body of Christ fell into apostasy. Today, the body of Christ remains confused and divided, and the confusion and division can be traced back to the issues debated in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Few perceive what was at stake when the leaders of the Assembly in Jerusalem convened this special Council.

This book takes the reader through the likely arguments that were made at the Council and explains why both sides were desperate to win the day. It also reveals that while Paul’s argument was accepted by the leaders of the Council, the body of Christ as a whole eventually rejected Paul and his gospel.

Who Were These Fathers of the Church?

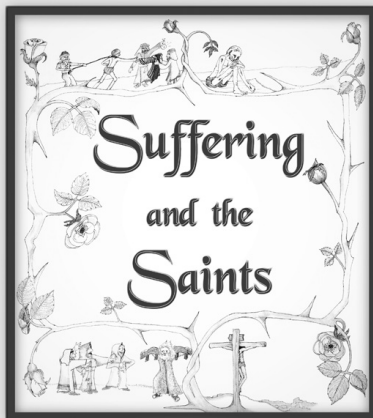


The church father, Irenaeus, observed, “Error is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced to be more true than the truth itself.” This is true.

The Apostate Fathers examines the teachings of some of the men whom, the author contends, are the “false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing” that Jesus and the apostles warned us of, to no avail. They won the battle for the hearts of the saints and

began the development of the religious system called Christianity.

Who Is in Charge of Our Suffering?



*Let those who suffer according to the will of God
commit their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*
1 Peter 4:19

John David Clark, Sr.

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

Are you hurting? Have you suffered a crushing loss? We all suffer from disappointment, misunderstanding, and betrayal. What are we to think? How do we respond?

In *Suffering and the Saints*, we will read the Biblical stories of men and women whose faith survived desperate situations. But this is more than a collection of stories. We will pay close attention to what they thought about their suffering and how they perceived God’s part in it. Only by understanding what they knew and

patterning our faith after theirs can we respond as they did, finding the strength to overcome evil with good, as they did, proving again that all things work together for good for those who are the called according to God’s purpose.

