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Foucault and Resurrection, with Patrick Stefan

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Alastair Roberts

Patrick Stefan joins me to discuss his new book, *The Power of Resurrection* (<https://amzn.to/37XsO3E>), and the value of engaging with the work of Michel Foucault.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today I am joined by my friend Patrick Stefan, who's going to be talking about his recently published book, *The Power of Resurrection, Foucault, Discipline, and Early Christian Resistance*. It's a very stimulating read, and he's here to talk about Foucault, about resurrection, and about some of the insights into early Christian origins, and the impact of the early Christian belief and practice of resurrection in the context of the Roman Empire.

Thank you very much for joining me. Thanks, Alastair. I appreciate the invitation, and I appreciate the interest in my work.

So your background is in working in Christian origins, continental philosophy, critical theory. You're a visiting lecturer at RTS, and you've also got a context where you're a chaplain in the army. What originally led you to this project? And can you give a couple

of sentence summary of your book? Sure, yeah.

So this is a revision of my dissertation that I did at the University of Denver in the Isle of School of Theology. And so I guess my short synopsis is I was interested in the ways by which the idea of resurrection became instantiated in its various material forms in the early Christian existence. But more than that, not just how ideas became kind of enfolded or turned into material conditions, also how those shaped early Christians and power dynamics in the Roman Empire.

I was at the time reading a bit of quite a lot of Foucault's work, I was working with the philosophy department out there, and I was pretty compelled by some of his thinking, especially some of his ideas on early Christianity that remained unexplored. And so I wanted to sort of move in that direction. So you've already mentioned the name Foucault, and many Christians, I think, have very negative connotations and associations with his name.

For some people, he conjures up this notion of postmodernism, which is very much a bugbear for many people, along with things like cultural Marxism, critical theory. And these concepts are not necessarily clearly defined, but they're widely understood to have very negative consequences in Christian thought in the contemporary context, and to be dangerous errors that are threatening and infecting the church. Now, it seems to me you're an Orthodox Christian, and you're writing a book that's appreciatively engaging with Foucault's work.

How do you justify yourself? And for those who have little knowledge of him, can you briefly introduce Foucault and some of his defining ideas? What is he really about? What is his argument? Yeah, that's a good question. I would say I can defend myself because I think when ideas are good, they're good, right, irrespective of where they're coming from. So Foucault, he died in 1984, and he was a French philosopher.

His primary project was looking at sort of the historical conditions that shaped humans in their historical periods. He really kind of rose to fame in 66 with the publication of *The Order of Things*, which he called an archaeology of the sciences. Basic idea was that sort of all periods of time have these underlying epistemological assumptions about what makes acceptable truth.

And in that work, he was dealing with scientific discourse, what makes it acceptable. And then he really rose to prominence in 75 with, I think, his most important work from my vantage point, which is *Discipline and Punish*. And then followed up very quickly with *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* in 78.

And there he was trying to kind of, his language about what he was doing turned from an archaeology into a genealogy and trying to understand the underlying structures to how we think as humans in the present, right? So how do we inhabit the world and how do we

understand ourselves as individuals and as subjects? And so from that, his kind of governing motif that he's well known for is his theory of power. So how does power work in any given society? Now with *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*, you almost got this sense that what he promoted was this idea that history works in one period of time, and then it's replaced by another type of power. I'm sorry, I said power.

Power works in one period of time, is replaced by another type of power, and then is replaced by another type of power as history continues. But then recently, all of his lectures have been published that he was working with during those two publications and have really kind of brought some complexity to his understanding. The basic idea is that power is always present in any given situation and it kind of governs our human interactions and power doesn't work from a top-down approach, whereby somebody accumulates a lot of power and then they exert it on somebody.

Rather, power works through what he calls kind of, it's kind of micro-power is what he calls it. It works through the various little ways that we don't even understand, we don't even pay attention to often. The ways that we interact with architecture, for example, the ways that schools are made and work, the way that the military uses drill and ritual, all of these kinds of things shape us in particular ways.

And that's really what he was about, is how are we shaped in particular ways based on the historical periodizations that have led us to one point and the one that we find ourselves in currently. So what do you think that Foucault has, the sort of negative associations that he has for many Christians today? Are these merited to any degree? How should Christians be engaging with him? Is there a way that we can read him critically, but also appreciatively? I think so. Yeah, so I'll say, so the negative association is because of his strong link with post-modernity, right? And where a lot of Christians kind of see it as the boogeyman, it gets very frightening.

Because post-modernity, let's face it, is sometimes just really hard to read. You read Derrida, he's really inaccessible, right? Foucault, by contrast, is very accessible. But anyhow, so his association, I think, with post-modernity gives him a negative perspective immediately.

Also, just some of his personal life choices. I don't want to give him a negative connotation. I know I pastored for seven years when I was writing this, actually.

And there was a young man who was raised an evangelical, kind of an Orthodox guy, had left the faith, and he was a philosophy student at a local university. And a friend of his said, oh, you should go talk to this pastor who's studying Foucault. And the guy comes by, and it's, you know, middle of the day.

There was no one at the church. I was doing some study. And he sits down and we're talking in that.

And he says to me, very interesting, and I think very telling, he says, it's fascinating to me that a pastor would choose to study a gay philosopher. Right? And that's part of the big hang up. Here's someone who has some life choices that we strongly disagree with, you know, maybe we would not even approach him.

So I think there's that. But I think the most important one is he's, people kind of relate him with the idea of relativism, particularly because he says things like, he flips knowledge as power on its head and says power is knowledge, to which some people might, some people interpret that as saying something to the effect of knowledge is just created through power. That it's kind of subjective and we make it if we're powerful, which is not what he means.

What he means is that we, the knowledge that we use and that we kind of understand is affected by the historical period that we're in and the periods that have come before us. And we're constantly enmeshed in history and we're constantly enmeshed in power struggles as well. And that shapes what we deem as acceptable knowledge, as unacceptable knowledge.

So knowledge isn't something that this thing that's off in the distance that we go and discover and find on the top of a mountain. Rather, it's always in the contestation of human relations. So I think that that's probably where the primary struggle somehow with Foucault is, is that connection with relativism and that.

And some of it is well founded, right, because I think some of it is well founded because for Foucault, he's not going to, let's see, he's strongly opposed to the any idea that history has a purpose or a telos, an end. It doesn't work in any kind of purposeful way. It just kind of is and it goes.

And similarly, he's also going to emphasize that knowledge is always caught up in power and that it is always kind of, let's see how to put it, society is always in various struggles, power struggles, and the group with the power will wind up shaping knowledge in the way that they want to. But for Foucault, he also wants to get heavily engaged in societal change. He contrasts himself with many philosophers who want to stand on the outside and just think about philosophy as kind of an academic exercise that we do in the academy.

I mean, he was well known for being arrested several times for going to many marches and going to many rallies and such because he thought philosophy ought to get involved in the power struggle. So he wants to create change, but he also doesn't want to telos at the same time. He's opposed to any kind of utopia.

And there is kind of a historical relativism that's going on there. So I can see the understanding. For me, and kind of my approach to him, I see none of this as, I see the way he does history as helpful as a sort of complement to the way I understand God and

sovereignty and secondary causation.

Namely, I can agree that things work in a very complex way and his history and power struggles shape how we are. But at the end of the day, there is an author who's outside of history in a sense and who does have a purpose of history, even though we may not be able to fully understand that in the present, outside of the inspiration of scripture. That's kind of how I work that through.

So a lot of your work seems to be trying to understand the impact of ideas and particularly how they take flesh, for want of a better way of putting it. And it seems to me that a lot of your project is distinct on the one hand from the sort of social scientific projects that you encounter in many circles and those approaches that downplay ideas, that suggest that it's very much an effect of social dynamics, rather than actual Christian content of belief systems. And on the other hand, it seems to be different from more conventional Christian accounts which so elevate ideas that can maybe exist in a sort of ethereal abstract realm and don't really explore the way that they take flesh and make a difference on the ground, the actual pathways of their impact.

Can you briefly discuss the sort of needle that you're trying to thread at this point and how someone like Foucault can help? How can he maybe shape our concept of what beliefs entail or what they actually are, for instance? Yeah, I think that puts it well because that's precisely what I am trying to do is thread that needle, because there are, you know, some traditional Christian accounts that are basically like, well, the idea was powerful that it just led to change in the empire. But there were other ideas that didn't lead to similar changes, right, and other powerful ideas that didn't lead to similar changes. We think of Judaism, for example, is one of those.

So, yeah, I think that I appreciate Foucault for this point because Foucault is going to emphasize that it is material conditions that shape the human in kind of a Marxist way, but not entirely, right. But Foucault also does this thing where he shows how the ways that we think about things shapes our material conditions, which then shapes the way we understand ourselves. So we might think about the body in a particular way, and then that leads us to take action in the material world, and thereby people are cycled through society through that material, the material instantiation of the idea.

And, you know, one of the things that I think is helpful about this, you know, when you pastor as well and you think about interacting with people, counseling with people, and preaching and all of these things, I mean, there have been so many times where I've interacted with somebody who I know they have the right beliefs, I know they have the right ideas, and yet they make a decision that is totally in contrast with what they believe, right. And often what happens is to make that decision, which is the decision generally feeds the material desire that they have, they shift their ideas and their beliefs just slightly, just enough to make the decision. We see this a lot, like sometimes when

people divorce their spouse, they don't believe in divorce, but then they'll just slightly change it in order to get what they want, right.

And so, I not only think this is right just from a theoretical perspective, but I've kind of seen it take place as well, where, you know, people might have all the right beliefs, but they don't act according to those very often, you know. I think, along with that, one of the things I've noticed in the course of my work, particularly on the subject of gender, there can be these beliefs that function at a more theoretical level, but what really matters often are the practices by which those beliefs play out within the community. And often those practices are deeply dysfunctional or distorted, and they just don't receive much attention.

People largely ignore that. They think that all that matters are these more abstract beliefs, and provided that people hold these, what actual shape they take in terms of concrete practice can be largely ignored and papered over with whatever beliefs it is that we hold. And I think what you're suggesting within your project is a very helpful way of drawing attention to that layer of connection between the belief and the practice that can so easily be ignored.

Yeah, I think so. I think that's precisely kind of what I'm after in that. And I, you know, I talk about this a bit in my introduction, where you read a lot of New Testament scholars, early Christian scholars, guys like Mike, for example, who will just say outright, and he'll repetitively say it throughout his book on the resurrection, that because the early Christians said Jesus is not Lord, or I'm sorry, Jesus is Lord, therefore, Caesar was not Lord.

But that's problematic when Caesar can still put you on the cross or put you in the arena or take your taxes. I mean, the idea only has so much merit, right? It only goes so far. And so what I was trying to do, essentially, was take that idea and say, I think that's right.

But I think we also have to show how it makes it into the real world to actually shape the way they see that the early Christian individual sees himself vis-a-vis the Empire. So you mentioned the Empire there, and there is a broader tradition, particularly in New Testament scholarship over the last few decades, with Richard Horsley and others, and N.T. Wright has taken it up. Jesus and Empire scholarship.

And your work seems to relate in part to this tradition. How would you see yourself relative to that tradition? Do you see yourself as trying to advance it in a very particular way and being a member of it? Do you see yourself pushing back against it at key points? Yeah, that's a good question. I definitely see myself as indebted to it, insofar as I think that there's a lot that they bring up that is right.

Just the simple reality that sometimes we forget to mention that much of the early Jesus

movement was underclass, people who were not treated very well by an empire. And much of what they draw attention to as well is the Roman Empire was pretty nasty. It wasn't exactly this peaceful society that sought everyone's good and benefit.

If you weren't at the top of the social ladder, it wasn't a great place to be. So I appreciate those two insights that they bring out. And also indebted insofar as I do think that there is a critique against imperial forms of governing in the Roman Empire, the way that the Empire did business.

But I would push back against, particularly Horsley on this point and some others in that vein, that I don't think that critique was directly attributed. It was solely Roman focused. I appreciate Christopher Bryan's work on this in *Rendered a Caesar*.

And his argument is essentially that, you know, the critique that is leveled, there is a critique, but the critique has more to do with the general prophetic voice of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Old Testament, where evil governments are condemned by God. And Rome just happened to be one manifestation of that. And so the critique in a sense is no different than the apocalyptic tradition, no different than the prophetic tradition of the past.

It just so happened to be the fact that Rome was the one that crucified the Son of God. And Rome was the one that happened to be in the process because their judgment of death, unjust judgment of death, was overturned by God in the resurrection of the Son. And I think that that's where I see myself in.

And I think, so I put a lot of emphasis on Paul's sort of apocalyptic theology. I find myself indebted to that a bit too, where Paul is calling condemnation on the evil cosmos. And Rome is part of that, right? But they should repent and come to the Lord, repent of their evil and their injustice and to God and to justice.

That's kind of how I see myself in that tradition. You mentioned the idea of resurrection. You don't just focus upon Christian thought more generally, but particularly hone in on the concept of resurrection as one that has an impact upon the Empire and Christianity, the way that that plays out.

Can you say a bit more about why resurrection is such an important part of the picture for understanding the impact of the early Christian movement? Yeah, most definitely. I think a lot of times when we talk about resurrection as Christians, when Easter comes around and we're thinking resurrection, we're often thinking about things like new life or we're thinking about, you know, the future and stuff like that. And we fail to realize that the ways by which we came to understand how God would bring about justice through the resurrection were in times of oppression.

Right. So you think about the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. You think about in the

Second Temple literature, you think about the Maccabees and you think about the circumstances that's going on during these times where Daniel is right where the Maccabees are.

They're being oppressed by various governments who are treating them very badly. And the answer in both of these situations, and it continues to develop, the answer in both of these situations, both by Daniel and the Maccabees, is, you know, if we die, God will raise us up again. And in fact, in the Maccabees, it becomes even more acute.

Not only if we die, God will raise us up again, but he adds on, and he will judge you. Right. Continues on until you get into the New Testament, where the idea of resurrection has significant political importance.

It is God essentially saying that this person was treated unjustly, and it's God reversing that decision of death and then bringing about glory. Now, what makes Jesus's resurrection so important, and I think this is why resurrection took on so much depth of debate in the early periods, is because Jesus's resurrection was the great statement, essentially, that God has begun the process of bringing justice into the world, of bringing righteousness into the world. And by doing that, and I'm indebted to Ted Jennings on this point, there's something very important happens, right? When Jesus rises from the dead, it is in a sense God overturning the Roman death penalty, which is the highest penalty of the law.

And Ted Jennings brings in this quote from Derrida, where Derrida says something to the effect of, to overturn the death penalty or to take away the death penalty is to undermine the entire legal system. And I think, you know, there's in a sense that's what's happening there, where God is establishing his kingdom through the resurrection, over the unjust penalty of Rome and challenging the power of Rome in a kind of a backwards way. This is kind of how I articulate that.

Could you say a bit more about how we move from the fact and the idea of resurrection to very concrete social impact and some of the specific ways that you identify within the book in how this actually occurred? Yeah, so one of the things, let me kind of point, one of the things that drew my attention to this was, as I was reading, you know, as I was reading Foucault and kind of thinking about my project and that, I kept noticing resurrection pop up at these various important points. And it comes to really dominate early Christian discourse. And if you're just reading for resurrection, you find it all over the place.

There are entire treatises about what the resurrection is, what it looked like, what was matter involved, what about people who are eaten, what about people who were burned, all of this kind of stuff. So it becomes very important in the discourse of early Christianity. But more than that, it takes on a life in the sacraments, right, where baptism is strongly associated with resurrection in the western side of the empire.

If you go up more to north to east and north Syria, you find it associated more with birth rather than entombment. So there's a little bit of a difference. But it also takes on importance in the Eucharist, in the giving of the Lord's Supper, and so on and so forth.

So what I basically is I started to look at all the ways that resurrection finds itself taking root in the early Christian movement. And there are several that I found important. Number one, there was, I have a chapter on resurrection in what I call the theological imagination.

Christians began to produce these various texts, and we call them, you know, kind of Deutero canonicals, or we call them, you know, not canonicals, apocryphals, whatever we want to call them. And these various acts and gospels and so on and so forth that were not deemed canonical and many of which were deemed heretical as people started to look at them and develop them. But people became intensely concerned with what the resurrection of Jesus looked like in the here and now.

Right. So how did you how would Jesus interact with somebody if we were to meet him in the streets? So that's kind of one way in developing the imagination. And these things, there seems to be evidence that they were read pretty widely.

And then eventually, as clergy found out what was in them, they're like, yes, stop reading those kind of a thing. So people were reading them. And I have a little footnote in my book as I'm dealing with that.

I say something to the effect of, you know, I think it's often the case that that parishioners are reading things that if the clergy found out they were, they would prefer them not be reading those things. The left behind books of the first few centuries. Yeah, right.

I mean, how many how many, you know, women's Bible studies have the shack. They're reading the shack. I'm sure pastors like, no, don't read that.

You know, I think it's very similar in the early movement. And then and then I also deal with the ways by which resurrection shaped architecture. And and this one here, I don't think it was deliberate.

It might not have been deliberate. But I draw this contrast between how the Roman temple system worked. It was a large building generally or not too large, but it was focused on crowds.

Right. So big doors, big spaces, big crowds would come in and go around. You just kind of moved around with the crowd.

You're part of the crowd. But the focus was on the sacrifice, which was outside. And then then the God lived on the inside of the temple.

By contrast, when we start early Christian architecture, most notably in Dura Europos, Christian architecture was they just left walls up. They just it was partitioned in ways that was unique. So catechumens would would sit in a different room.

They wouldn't even sit in the room with the Eucharist. Right. Until they individually went through the baptismal thing and then came and they kind of walked this individualizing path with the purpose of getting to the Lord's Supper.

And the Lord's Supper was often understood as being kind of delivered through the resurrected Christ. Right. So the proximity of connecting with the resurrected Christ was demarcated by partitions and boundaries and doorways.

And, you know, I don't I don't think we can know whether this was deliberate or whether it was just because they didn't have the resources. Right. Which that might have been the case.

The act actually because it seems to be the case there didn't have they didn't have a lot of money. But either way, whichever was the case, if even if it was accidental, they still interpreted those partitions and those doorways as sort of an individualizing path by which one would eventually make it to receiving the supper from the resurrected Christ through the through the bishop. So, so that kind of an architecture and I pull that out a little bit more.

I also do a burial practices. There's a fascinating there's this kind of fascinating literature on on how Christians who went into the Coliseum. They were they were killed right at noon that noonday.

So, so the games were basically always governed over by the editor of the games, which was Caesar or his stand in. And it happened in three three three times. You had the beginning games, which was fighting against the animals, which demonstrated Caesar's power over the earth.

And then you had the noonday games, which was basically just a slaughter of criminals and people write about during the noonday games. This is the time where the most bloodthirsty stick around everyone else goes to lunch. Right.

And it's just this brutal killing where no one can receive honor during this time and then eventually get to the gladiator games where you can receive honor and you can get clemency from the governor from the editor of the games and so on and so forth. Christians were always killed in the noonday during the slaughter where Caesar demonstrated his power over law. But when Christians inscribe their participation in those games they describe themselves as gladiators, which is right.

And they always say that they are participating in the games under a different editor. Caesar, so they're earning honor, they're kind of reclaiming honor. And the reason why is

because they believe that at the end of the days, they will sit back and they will watch a far greater spectacle when God brings justice and that will happen in the resurrection.

So then after the dead, after they all after they're killed, you have them, you have the early Christian movement caring for the bodies of fallen Christians in ways that no criminal was cared for. They were buried and when they were described in burial they were described as merely being asleep, awaiting to be awoken in the resurrection of the dead, and they desired to be in close proximity to the martyrs and and all of this stuff. So, and then the last one is calendar formation that I deal with where you have the debates about the calendar which start with the debates right about Easter and then builds out to the Lord's Day.

The calendar becomes more and more precise on a weekly form and then the yearly form. We have this precision that begins to develop and it's all focused around how do we remember the resurrection of Jesus. So both on a weekly and an annual schedule Christians are habituated to centering their lives around the resurrection of a God, a man whom whom the Roman Empire declared to be a criminal.

Right. So I think that's all of that is going to very important in the ways that Christians saw themselves inhabiting the empire. Perhaps one of the things I found particularly stimulating about that sort of treatment is the way it takes something that has often been treated as a matter of historical curiosity and maybe more the interest of some niche historian and it presents it very much as integral to the impact of fundamental Christian beliefs.

So whether it's discussion of things such as church architecture or burial practices, baptismal rites, things like calendar formation. These are not things that are merely historical incidents that are of little significance beyond that for historian. These are the ways in which the rubber of the road, the rubber of resurrection hits the road of Christian understanding and practice.

And there I was wondering whether you would say something a bit more about the fact, most of these things are not explicitly enjoined by scripture upon us, but perhaps arise more through traditional and cultural means as elaborations of more primary practices and beliefs. And do you have any thoughts on the role that such elaborating elements should play more generally, both within those contexts and within our own. And are there any ways in which they're potentially dangerous? In what ways should the church maybe seek to develop these sorts of practices and what controls are there upon them? Yeah, that's a great question.

You know, from my own kind of principles and my confessional stance, you know, I believe, you know, I'm a regular principle kind of guy. I believe that scripture guides the way we do things. But you're absolutely right.

A lot of these things kind of develop because scripture sometimes is not, you know, doesn't say much about what you're building on to look like, you know. But let's take that example, you know, I think, because I think that's a helpful one. People have drawn attention to the ways by which our church architecture is shaped by and shapes our understanding of God and the divine, right? A church architecture might emphasize more transcendence or more imminence and so on.

One of the things I think my work does, if you look at it from this perspective, is it kind of flips that question on its head and asks this secondary question, well, what about how these architectural forms shape our understanding of ourselves and who we are, how we exist in God's world? And I think that that's an important point, right? If we want to cultivate an individual who is focused on God, those questions ought to come into our minds when we think about things like architecture or things like how we do the calendar or how we, you know, how we structure liturgy. Liturgy is another part I deal with in there, early Christian liturgy and how that differed around the empire and how it all sort of started to funnel into the resurrection. But just kind of, I think it's important to realize that it's not only as if our practices are just a reflection of our theology, they're also shaping to us.

They make us think about the world in particular ways and kind of encounter the world in particular ways. And I think that's something that ought to be, you know, some attention ought to be given to. Could you maybe say something more about how Christian society that was formed by these sorts of practices differed from society as ordered by Caesar? Yeah.

So what my argument is, in essence, is that Roman society was governed. I'm going to go back into Foucault for just a second. Roman society was governed by what Foucault calls sovereign power.

And sovereign power is basically the way we kind of live in this apparatus of power is that there is a sovereign, a king, and he exacts his power based on restoring his honor. So if there's a crime in the empire, the king must, the crime is ultimately against the king, and the king must restore his honor. And he does so through the executioner or the torturer.

And the torture has to be basically a thousand deaths because the king has to show how much more powerful he is. And so we live with this sort of, it's a fear of embodied punishment. So I don't do something because I fear being whipped or beaten or crucified or whatever the case might be.

Now, Foucault says that in the 18th century, there's a shift that takes place to disciplinary power. And disciplinary power is namely, we're not, we're not, we're no longer afraid of being beaten or flogged or crucified. You know, we don't not speed because we're afraid that the police will pull us over and beat us.

Rather, we self-discipline internally because we fear that we may be being watched at any time. And there are various mechanisms that make us live this way. Similarly, there are mechanisms that make sovereign power work the way sovereign power does.

So what my essential argument is, is that the world in Roman was governed by sovereign power where everyone was essentially afraid of the Caesar. But what Christian, these, this Christian instantiation of resurrection in material forms did is it introduced these mechanisms, actually it kind of brought to the surface these mechanisms of disciplinary power that made people begin to internalize the discipline and made people begin to see themselves as individuals who serve another Lord, right? So no longer afraid of death because the key to sovereign power is that the sovereign has the right to take life. That's the primary element of sovereign power.

But in the resurrection, his right to take life is insignificant because God will give it right back again. And similarly, we have this individualizing effect where time becomes more precise and where we start to think about ourselves as individual in relation to God and where we start to think like, well, you know, Christ is risen and he can see what I do at any time. And so I should watch my actions and this becomes a part of Christian tradition.

Right? So I'd say in that sense, I think that there's a difference that starts to arise. Now what Foucault says next is that once Constantine arises to the, well, I posit this actually, Foucault says essentially that in the fourth century, what starts as pastoral power, which is disciplinary power in the monastery. I posit the idea that that happens because Constantine comes to the throne and the early Christian subversion sort of melds with the empire.

So I guess I don't know if that answers your question at all. But those are the kind of two ways that I see society working and how it affects power relations in the empire. You use words like subversion, disciplinary society, other things like that within your book on a number of occasions.

First of all, how could you unpack these terms? These are a bit more, maybe have a bit more stipulated definitions than the more conventional definitions we might use for them. And how, if at all, do you think that a Christian understanding of the weight of these terms might differ from what you might find in Foucault more generally? And how do you think we can draw upon these concepts as they appear within Foucault, but also distinguish, for instance, what discipline means within a Christian understanding from that within the disciplinary societies of the panopticon or something like that? Oh, yeah, that's a great question. So by subversion, I simply mean kind of the replacement, the active replacement of one set of ideals and values with another set of ideals and values, right? The challenge of a governing sort of or a dominant mode of thinking about the world.

That's simply all I mean by subversion. Subverting what Rome said was reality with a Christian ideal and a Christian ethic. And I think that this is, this is, Foucault would say this is always taking place, right? There's always points of resistance.

Foucault says wherever you find power, you will find resistance to that power. So that's all I mean by subversion. But Foucault also says that a revolution or a true subversion can take place when there are multiple cleavages or multiple points of resistance that take place attacking one sort of thing.

What I try to outline. By disciplinary society, I am really leaning on and kind of extrapolating on Foucault's idea of what a disciplinary society is. And that's essentially the society that is governed by disciplinary power.

That is power that works on the soul, works on the inside, not on the body per se. And it sees one person as part of a larger body. And so the social body comes to govern itself by means of kind of sort of casting out those who are abnormal and those who are normal, creating a set of abnormality and normality.

So, and the ways that we maintain normality is to create this impression that we're always, we might be always being watched. And you think about it. I mean, you have somebody who's standing on a corner, you know, and it's raining outside and they, they're not crossing the street because there are, you know, orange lights that make up a hand on the other side.

And they're still deciding not to cross the street. Why are they determining not to do that? Nobody's around. Nobody's going to see them.

But they've internalized the discipline to act in society the way that society wants them to act. Now, so that's kind of what Foucault means by disciplinary society. I think, obviously, I think that there is obviously helpful elements to discipline.

I think it's part of the Christian tradition for a reason. In fact, and let me go back on this, the guiding question that made me start my was this, I was reading Christer Stendhal's article on the introspective conscience of the West. And I noticed that, you know, Stendhal makes this kind of blanket claim that all of a sudden the introspective individual just starts with Augustine.

Like, and he gives no justification as to how that came about or why it's just Augustine. And all of a sudden, the rest of Christianity is introspective, which is what Foucault would say is disciplined. Right? And so I posited the idea that perhaps this has always been part of the Christian message, you know, that Paul articulates.

And perhaps it was developing so that our Augustine kind of can kind of fully say it in a full theological development. And that's why it becomes part of our tradition. That's kind of one of the guiding motifs of my project.

But I think that there's a reason why Christians start to think along these lines, because we understand, right, that God sees our heart. The author to the Hebrews says this in no uncertain terms, that God sees inside our true intentions and what we are thinking. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 5 about, you know, how it's the desires of the heart that are sinful as well as just the action.

And so I think that we, I think this is part of who we are as Christians, that God cares about how we think, how we are, and how we act. He cares about all of those elements. And so as these practices become instantiated in early Christian formation, it started to make the disciplined individual that then, you know, we care about confession.

We care about repentance. We care about these kinds of things, because we care ultimately about our relationship with a God who is all seeing and all knowing. And I think that's important.

I don't think it's necessarily a negative thing. I do think, though, that that idea did become prominent in society in the 18th century. I don't think necessarily all of those things are good.

But I think when we think about it in our relationship to God, I think that we ought to think that way. Christian anthropology very much emphasizes the integration of body and soul. And when you deal with Foucault's approach and the approach of many others, they bring the body to the forefront and the ways that bodies are ordered within society and regimented in certain respects.

How do you think that that approach, that foregrounds the body, can really be of service to Christian anthropological understanding of how we are formed as whole persons? Because very much in much of the tradition, despite the anthropology, we've emphasized more ethereal ideas that address very much to the mind alone. How does that give us a broader understanding of how the whole being of the human being is addressed by God's truth? Yeah, that's a good question. In fact, Foucault, when he gets into the discussion of disciplinary power, starts to talk a lot about the soul.

Though he doesn't mean the soul that we generally mean in kind of a metaphysical sense, right? Foucault's talking about the inner self. And he says that the inner self is created through disciplinary practices. So Foucault starts, in fact, that's actually one of the projects I want to work on next is understanding fully what Foucault means by the soul, because there's nothing that deals with it right now.

But yeah, the soul becomes important insofar as the body shapes the soul's discipline. And what I think is helpful about that, if we think about it from sort of a Christian theology perspective, is to understand that the ways that we treat our bodies and the ways that we habituate our bodies shapes the ways that we act. And this is why I think kind of the Christian kind of tradition of habit and of disciplines are important that we

find in like Augustine, for example.

The habits that we implement in our bodies shape our internal desires for God, our soul's desire for God. And we even see this from a very practical level, right? When somebody is in writhing pain in their body, it affects their soul's disposition. It affects who they are and it affects how they feel.

And I think just having kind of sensitivity to that is important. And then also realizing that we're not just minds in a vat. So it's not as if we can just read a lot of theology and grow in our relation to God.

There's a reason why the author of the Hebrews says, don't neglect gathering together. There's a reason why Christian tradition has always implemented this kind of ritual of embodied movement in our worship. Because the way that we think about our bodies in relation to God and in relation to others, I think, shapes the way that we've that we, it shapes our relationship to God and our just our spiritual growth and our spiritual movement, I think.

You've mentioned the importance of resurrection as challenging the authority of Caesar based upon the death penalty, things like that. But here you're talking about the way in which the body can be a means by which the soul is formed. And the belief in resurrection, in addition to being a statement about the death penalty exercised by Caesar, is also a deep anthropological claim.

Do you think that's part of the reason why that particular belief proved to be so potent in shaping society and Christian existence and understanding itself? I do think so. Yes. I mean, the theology of the resurrection as it was articulated, and it's important to remember, it's not as if all of a sudden, post-Paul, we had this full theology of the resurrection.

I mean, this was hashed out over the second and third centuries for some time about what exactly it meant and who went on what side. And in fact, Caroline Walker Bynum says something to the effect of, you know, there's nothing, like, the Christian tradition could have just as easily gone in a Gnostic direction. And in fact, that would have been really palatable to the Roman kind of taste of religion.

It's just say, yeah, we get resurrected, but it's kind of a spiritual sort of thing. And we kind of come up and the body doesn't matter. It might have been more attractive to Roman thinker or Roman inhabitants, but it didn't.

It went in a very physical, material, recreation of bits direction so that we understood, so that Christians are understood and they articulated that the body matters to God. And the body of the martyr matters to God intensely. The martyr would not be left scattered in the river or eaten by some wild beast.

God would craft that body back together because that body is part of God's creation. I think most definitely. I think it reminds us to as Christians, just the importance of the created order, of the importance of nature, the importance of us as humans.

And the importance just of having embodied connection with other people, of interacting with other people. Judith Butler talks a little bit about this in, I can't remember what book it is. But she talks about how we discover ourselves when we meet with other humans face to face.

We learn more about ourselves. And I think that's true. There's a reason why cyberbullying becomes so easy to do when you're on the Internet and you're disembodied from someone else.

Or why road rage is so easy when you wouldn't do that same thing if you were standing face to face with somebody. Because there's something about the human connection that when it's an embodied connection, it reminds us that these created bodies that God gave to us are important and they matter. And we ought to care for them and realize that when Christ returns and dead rise, this is where we'll be.

We'll have our bodies because God loves us. And I also think it's important too to just really emphasize the importance of focusing on the resurrection of the body in Christian funerary practices. And emphasizing it's not just a remembrance.

It's not just a memorial of life. That's not what we do as Christians. When we have a funeral, we lament the loss of life and the pain of the fall and death.

But we hope because this body will rise from the dead one day because it's just going to sleep and soon enough it will be woken. And that will happen when Christ comes and kind of rings the alarm, so to speak. What happens to the subversive power of resurrection when the emperor converts? So, well, I think in a sense, it kind of works, right? Christianity becomes the dominant religion in the empire, begins to receive funds.

It takes over the empire. The disciplinary practices, though, I think move into the monastic period. That's what I would argue.

And then one day I'd like to write something that moves more in this direction too. But I think what happens is those disciplinary practices of articulating time very carefully, of maintaining firm partitions and boundaries, of sort of focusing on the constant watch of the soul, all of those things really take up residence in the monasteries and in Christian asceticism. And during the time when during kind of Constantinian success of Christianity at that period, that's what scholars call kind of the gray of the monastery.

That's when monasteries kind of take off. And then it would then Foucault would say they sort of that's where the disciplinary practices sort of ferment, so to speak. And then they become instantiated in the modern prison and the modern military.

This is 18th century. And then that becomes modern disciplinary society. Do you see the project as having a sort of apologetic force for the resurrection and for the truth of Christianity? And if you do, how would you express that? I, you know, I really didn't didn't write it with that intent.

It was really kind of a just a it was really a work of scholarship in early Christianity and trying to understand early Christianity from a from the angle of theory of power. I think that if I were to go in that direction, what I might say is that the resurrection of Jesus is that thing that that challenges injustice in very real ways. And it is the great statement.

So if we think about it theologically, I think the resurrection of Jesus is the great statement that God has acted in the world and that God cares about the world and that God, that God loves us. And he he came down and became became a man for us in our salvation and underwent all of this. And through the resurrection, Jesus, the Son of God was vindicated and was glorified.

So I think from that element, from kind of a theological theological perspective, I guess I could go in that direction. But really, from the way I did scholarship and the way I kind of did history there, it didn't have any apologetic interest in mind in that. Just in conclusion, we're going through very significant changes in the material form of Christian practice with the development of new audiovisual media and the movement to social media, things like digital Bibles and texts and just the ways that we're reordering Christian practice around things like the car, around the development of different sorts of music traditions.

How could someone like Foucault help us in understanding and even shaping contemporary Christian practice? How might he help us to think more perceptively about what's taking place, the impact that it is having and the way that we should critically engage with it? Yeah, I would say, I think that how he can help us is that he can help us pay attention to both two things. Number one, how we are being forced to do things as humans. Right.

And that's what it comes down to. How are we being conditioned to do things, to stare at our phones and to look at the Bible in a phone form rather than a codex? And what does that do to our interaction with the text and all of these kinds of things? How does that shape us? Right. First, but second of all, pay attention to where the rhetoric of power lies, like pay attention to where society finds things is the most important.

And this is where the true kind of focus is going to be. So Foucault would say that we now sort of live in an age of biopower, the biopolitical world and biopower developed out of disciplinary power. It's a component of it.

So we are kind of in a disciplinary society, but biopower is kind of our dominant apparatus of power and biopower in contrast to disciplinary power, which is about

disciplining the soul. And in contrast to sovereign power, which is about taking life, biopower is about preserving life or giving life. So the things that become most important now is we're talking about power over the species or power over the population rather than a given social body.

So the things that it's fascinating to me as I watch discourse take place about, say, like climate change, for example, climate change rhetoric. Just listen to the rhetoric of climate change, for example, Greta Thunberg and the way that she talked about whole populations being decimated, where you might sit back and you're like, well, maybe not. I mean, it's a significant problem, right? But the rhetoric works because it is so focused on the power of preserving life.

And so think about how we as Christians might interact with that a little bit more, interact with people who are, you know, we digitize our bodies. We wear Apple watches that monitor every movement in every heartbeat. We do all of these things to habituate ourselves to the world.

And we might think as Christians, how do we minister to a world that thinks according to physical life? And I think resurrection actually has a lot to say to that, right, about the importance of the body, but the reality of the fall. Thank you so much for coming on. This has been a fascinating conversation.

If people are interested in your book, the book is *The Power of Resurrection*. Where would people get a copy of the book? It's published through Fortress Academic with Roman and Littlefields. I think you can get it on Roman and Littlefields book on their website or on Amazon.

It is a monograph, so it's one of those monograph prices, unfortunately. I think those are probably the two best places, or if you have any interest or want to talk to people are welcome to send me an email too. And you're welcome to post my email on that.

Thank you so much for coming on. And if you have found this helpful, please leave a comment and discuss it in the comment section. If you have any questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account and God bless.

And thank you for listening. Thanks Alistair.