

Church History

Christians vs Rome

Christians vs Rome

- Rome tolerant of religions provided they added homage to the emperor in their religious ceremonies.
- One exception to this provision – the Jews
 - Fanatical loyalty to their one true God
 - Willingness to die before acknowledging another deity.
 - The Jews were sort of a closed culture – worshipped largely by themselves – were not actively proselyting
- As long as Rome considered Christians to be a part of the Jews, the Christians had the same protection.

Separation of Jews and Christians

- Basically three groups of Jewish Christians:
 - Jews who demanded circumcision and following the law.
 - Jews who did not demand circumcision, but faith in Jesus.
 - Jews influenced by Gnostics.

Christians vs Rome

- Four things that caused Rome to despise the Christians:
 - “Saint” – holy, set apart, dedicated
 - Different
 - The slanders told about them (cannibal, incest, immorality [libertine Gnostics])
 - Denial of other gods – atheism (denial of custom)
 - Worship of Caesar
 - Roman Peace – law and order, roads, safety from robbers, tyrants, pirates. A new security.
 - Gratitude for the “spirit of Rome” lead to the leader of Rome.

Worship of Caesar

- Every year come to temple of Caesar – burn pinch of incense and say “Caesar is Lord” – then go worship any god you wanted to as long as it did not affect public decency and order.
 - Given a certificate to guarantee a citizen had done so.
- Coins of Rome – “Hail, Lord of the Earth, Invincible, Power, Glory, Honor, Blessed, Great, Worthy art Thou to inherit the Kingdom.”
- Revelation 13

Pliny found three distinct classes among those against whom accusations had been brought:

1. Those who confessed they were Christians and remained steadfast in the confession—these he ordered for execution, or if they were Roman citizens, ordered them to be sent to Rome.

2. Those who denied they had ever been Christians—these he released, since they recited a prayer to the gods and offered incense and wine to a statue of the emperor, “things which those who are really Christians cannot be made to do,” and so a reasonable test to determine who was a Christian and who would prove loyal to Rome.

3. Those who apostatized, those who had been Christians but had ceased to be such (a few of these apostatized twenty years ago—that is, under Domitian) and proved it by worshipping the emperor’s statue and the gods and cursing Christ—from them Pliny learned what he knew of Christianity, nothing really dangerous, only “a perverse and extravagant superstition.”

Pliny the Younger's question to Trajan

- Pliny asked Trajan three questions: (1) Are any distinctions to be made for age or weakness? (2) Are apostates to be pardoned? (3) Does punishment attach to the name itself or to crimes connected with the name?

Trajan gave three answers

- 1. Christians were not to be sought out, but if accused and convicted they were to be punished. This may sound contradictory but was according to normal Roman legal procedure. Rome did not have a public prosecutor, and the legal system was set in motion by an individual making a formal charge before a magistrate.
- 2. No anonymous accusations were to be received. An accuser had to act in the proper judicial manner by coming forward in his own person.
- 3. The deniers were to be pardoned; punishment was, therefore, on the basis of the “name.” Christian Apologists argued strongly against this procedure, but the course of Roman legal action had been set.

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70-200	Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs	150-200	Acts of Peter	200-230	Exegesis on the Soul
73-200	Mara Bar Serapion	150-200	Acts of John	200-250	Didascalia
80-100	2 Thessalonians	150-200	Acts of Paul	200-250	Books of Jeu
80-100	Ephesians	150-200	Acts of Andrew	200-300	Pistis Sophia
80-100	Gospel of Matthew	150-225	Acts of Peter and the Twelve	200-300	Tripartite Tractate
80-110	1 Peter	150-225	Book of Thomas the Contender	200-300	Hypostasis of the Archons
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