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Karl H. Maier

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_maierk@csl.edu

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**The Causes for the Persecution
of the Early Christians.**

A thesis

**presented to the faculty of
Concordia Theological Seminary
Saint Louis, Mo.**

by

Karl H.E. Maier

**in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree
of**

Bachelor of Divinity.

Saint Louis, Mo.

March Second, Nineteen Hundred Twenty-Seven

CAUSES FOR THE PERSECUTION OF

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

The popular and traditional view of the persecutions of the Christians considers them to be ten in number lasting from 64 to 311 A.D. The persecutions are looked upon as fiendish and arbitrary attacks of various emperors against Christianity out of hatred, and periods of comparative quiet appear to be indication that some emperors favored or recognized Christianity. The consideration of the persecutions in this light leads to the opinion that they were all of the same nature, and gives no indication of the real depth of the conflict and the issues involved.

All persecutions were not of the same nature. Persecution was brought about by different circumstances and for different reasons in numerous instances, and though there appear to have been times of peace and quiet in a measure, the Church was always a hostile power as far as the state was concerned. The motives for these persecutions may, however, be generally grouped under several chief causes, and these form the basis for the material following. Never in the history of the world has there been a conflict which entailed

such great consequences or involved so momentous issues as the struggle between Christianity and the Roman state.

Christians were persecuted and expelled from Rome, together with the Jews, by Claudius, but the first bloody attack upon the believers was launched in 64 A.D. when the accusation of having fired the city of Rome was placed upon the Christians by Nero. From this time to 311, antagonism was rife against the Christians, displayed by persecution whenever the new belief became too powerful. While persecution did not always postulate the death sentence, this was usually the case. Nor must the fact be overlooked that the persecutions varied decidedly in fury and vehemence. The attacks of Nero and Domitian were merely acts of hatred and cruelty, although by Nero's example a general policy of persecution was inaugurated. The Decian persecution was in the full intention of the term, a systematic endeavor to extirpate the Church. Trajan and those who followed him took action for the most part against individuals, employing definite legal procedure. The attack of Diocletian, the last and most bloody of the persecutions, was heathenism's final blow in the contest.

As already stated, the persecution of the believers

in 64 under Nero was the first official ban placed on them. This persecution was likely confined to Rome. A second persecution followed under the rule of Domitian, (81-96), whose cupidity and suspicion brought death to many. Under Trajan (98-117), a third occurred in which some Christians suffered martyrdom. Persecution was at this time in force in the provinces. Under Hadrian persecution was not totally discontinued, but was greatly diminished. Marcus Aurelius characterized his reign by an increased vehemence of persecution, especially in Vienne and Lyons in southern France. (161-180). Septimus Severus was for a time favorably inclined to some Christians, but it is evident that many suffered in his time. Eusebius (Hist. Ec. bk. 6, chap. 41) records a severe persecution in Alexandria at this time. Decius Trajan attempted anew and systematically to eradicate the Church, which is estimated at this time to have had a membership of not less than thirty thousand. This condition persisted until after the reign of Valerian, when a period of comparative rest and quiet ensued for about forty years. In 303, under Diocletian, heathenism and the Roman state began a combined struggle for existence in one last effort to annihilate Christianity. The edict of toleration, if there was one, was set aside and the old heathen worship was reinstated. It is

generally accepted that this persecution continued for ten years, during which time, according to Sulpicius Severus, "almost the whole world was stained with the precious blood of the martyrs". (*Qua tempestate omnis fere sacro martyrum cruore orbis infectus est*"-Sul. Sev. Hist. bk. 2, chap. 47). A persecution in the army, started in 301, caused many military men to desert their profession and to embrace private life rather than renounce the worship of Christ. On this account, many suffered death (Eus. Hist. Ec. bk. 8, chap. 4). This state endured until after the advent of Constantine and the victory of Christianity.

Heathen writers, as well as Christian authors, make mention of the fortitude which the martyred Christians displayed under torture and punishment. In this connection are mentioned among others the martyrs Ignatius, Polycarp, Pothinus, Blandina, Sanctus, Laurentius, and Cyrillus. Methods of torture were ingenious and fiendish in the extreme, and though the Christians were hated, and Tacitus himself disliked them, he admits that the cruelty with which they were handled was of a nature to excite compassion (*miseratio oriebatur--non utilitate publicata sed in saevitiam unius absumerenter*- Ann. 15:44). An epistle to the churches at Pontus, (Eus. bk. 4, chap. 15)

tells of one instance of torture: "For those standing around were struck with amazement at seeing them lacerated with scourges to the very blood and arteries, so that the flesh concealed in the very inmost parts of the body and the bowels themselves were exposed to view. Then they were laid upon conch shells from the sea and on sharp heads and points of spears on the ground, and after passing through every kind of punishment and torture, were at last thrown to the beasts". Blandina, an example of devotion to her confession, was scourged and suspended on a stake as a prey to the wild beasts, was roasted in an iron chair, was tied up in a net to be cast about on the horns of an infuriated bull, and when these and other tortures had failed was finally despatched. Others were placed in iron chairs over a hot fire and were allowed to roast slowly, the fumes and odors of their burning flesh rising about them to nauseate them. At the time of Nero, according to Sulpicius and others, Christians were tied up in the skins of wild beasts to be worried and torn by dogs, others were crucified, being set up as lights in the night. (Plerique in id reservati, ut cum defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis uterentur. - Sul. Sev. Hist. bk. 2, chap. 41). In connection with Nero's tortures, several ancient writers make mention of the "troublesome coat"

This was a garment or sack made of paper or rough linen cloth. Having been impregnated with wax, resin, or other combustible substance, it was put upon the person appointed, and in order that the illusion of a flaming torch might be preserved, his chin was attached to a stake driven into the ground. The entire mass was then ignited. Seneca characterizes this as a cruel death when he writes: "Imagine here a prison, crosses, and racks, and the hook, and a stake thrust through the body and coming out at the mouth, and the limbs torn out by chariots pulling adverse ways, and that coat, besmeared and interwoven with combustible materials, nutriment for fire, and whatever else beside their cruelty has invented. It is no wonder if in such a case fear rises high, where the variety of evils is so great, and the preparation so terrible" (Seneca, Epistula 14). Juvenal makes reference to the cruelties of Nero in some of his satires when he mentions the "pitched shirt" or the "troublesome coat", and when he states: "At the stake they shine, who stand with throat transfixed and smoke and burn".

Eusebius relates that many who were taken into custody, being confined in the darkest and most loathesome places in the prisons, were so tormented on the stocks

and otherwise by prison attendants that they suffocated. Many young people especially died in this way. (Eus. bk. 5, chap. 1). Women were subjected to all nature of shame and indignities before being finally executed. Other methods of torture recorded are stoning, death at the stake, plucking out of eyes, smearing the naked bodies of women as well as of men with wax or pitch and applying flame, applying glowing brass plates to the most sensitive parts of the body, and crucifixion.

Christianity was by no means the only new religion which made its influence felt in the Roman Empire in the first three or four centuries A.D. For over two hundred years before the advent of Christianity, Oriental religions and cults had been flourishing among the cosmopolitan citizenship of the Roman empire. Among these, the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris, the Phrygian worship of Cybele, the goddess of fertility, and the service of the Persian light-god Mithra were outstanding. Mithraism and the Egyptian cult, though attacked and prohibited more than once, had by persistence fought their way to the position of recognized, though generally detested, religions. The Jews were converting Gentiles to the worship of the God of Israel. Rome was a

veritable Babel of religions and cults, all of which were making an appeal, good or otherwise, to the Roman citizenry. The Roman government embraced a policy of toleration of all its subjects in the practise of their several religions. Livy relates that the Anagnini, an Italian people under Rome, had displeased the imperial government, and the senate took from them all power and authority, "except what was necessary for the administration of their religious rites". (Anagninis, quique arma Romanis intulerant concilia connubiaque adepta et magistratibus, praeterquam sacrorum curatione, interdictum. Livy, bk. 9, chap. 43). This shows, then, that though all civil liberties were removed, out of respect for the national character of the Anagnini, religious freedom was granted as a matter of governmental policy. The Egyptian rites, perhaps the most widely different from the Roman rites (with the exception of Christianity and the Jewish belief), though despised and ridiculed by Roman authors, and especially Augustus, were practised without molestation from the Romans until a later date when the excessive promotion of acts of debauchery on the part of the priests caused the restraint of the performance of the rites. The Jewish religion was allowed existence, having been persecuted once in the time of Claudius, when it was prohibited for reasons political

rather than religious; and the Jews were the recipients of many favors on the part of the government. The old Romans protected, though with a sort of contempt, people of all sects and religions, and their priests and worshippers were not molested nor their rites prohibited unless they were guilty of some misdemeanor against public morality, good manners, or the government. Though laws had been passed against foreign religions, any religion which could claim a national or tribal basis for its existence was suffered to continue under the Roman policy of state and national religionism. Christianity was not of this category, as will be later demonstrated. Christianity came, not as something absolutely new, but rather as one more religion, one more attempt to solve the problem of life for mankind.

The Roman government had a totally different view of religion than that which exists in our minds. The state claimed the right to decide what god or gods should be worshipped, and though it did not concern itself about the private opinions of individuals, it insisted that reverence be paid to the public objects of adoration. The first duty of man was to the state, then religion might follow. Religion was rather a matter of race and nationality than of conviction in the

the Roman mind, and this fact is of great importance in determining the causes for persecution. With these facts in mind, it is not difficult to ascertain some of the causes for the persecution of the early Christians

Christianity was not a creed of bitterness,--all its tenets exemplified peace. It was not a creed of hatred; it was a religion of love, and yet it was bathed for two hundred years in a stream of the blood of its martyrs. So we ask, why was Christianity persecuted?

The persecution of the Christians will be here viewed under the following headings as causes for the conflict:

I. The Racial Causes,--the Jewish situation, the fact that the Christians were persecuted because they were regarded as Jews by the pagans, and as non-Jews by the Jews themselves.

II. The Legal Causes,--Christianity was not a lawful religion.

III. The Nationalistic or Imperial Causes,--Christianity was not a national religion, and the Christians were looked upon as atheists and anarchists, dangerous to the welfare of the state.

IV. Hatred as a cause for persecution,--the Christians were falsely charged with crimes they had never committed.

V. Social Causes, -the Christian attitude of family life, morality, celibacy, aloofness from affairs of the empire.

VI. Religious Causes, -aloofness from other religions, peculiarity of the Christian doctrines in the heathen eye.

VII. Popular Prejudice. Priests and artisans incited persecution when their source of livelihood was impaired. The charge of magic, the blame for all calamities which was laid on the Christians.

VIII. The Economic Situation, -Christianity was a total departure from existing conditions, and threatened a revolution of life, morality, and customs.

IX. Exclusiveness of Christianity, -Refusal to indulge in emperor worship. (The cause of exclusiveness is found and noted also indirectly in the last five causes.)

Christians were persecuted, being mistaken for Jews.

Christians were first persecuted in the reign of Claudius, about the year 53, when, because they were mistakenly identified as Jews, many were expelled from Rome, because of continual rioting and disturbances on the part of the Jews. Suetonius is authority for the statement that the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of a certain Chrestus. (Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit.-Life of Claudius, 25:4) Tacitus and others are silent on this point, but the statement Acts 18:2 that a Jew, Aquila, and his wife, Priscilla, had recently come to Corinth from Italy because of the deportation order of Claudius, seems to harmonize with and to substantiate the reference. While the edict of Claudius was directed specifically against the Jews, it also affected the Christians, who were not yet distinguished from the Jews in the popular and governmental opinions. The term "Chresto" has been explained as a heathen error for Christo, and it is true that this misconception was almost invariable with the heathen and was continued as late as the fourth century. The commotion spoken of by Suetonius refers likely to messianic controversies between the Jews and the Christians

who were at this time not yet clearly distinguished. Neander and Schaff advocate this view, but Merrill sees no reference to the founder of the Christian sect in the name Chresto (p.103ff), and states that the reference is more likely to a Jewish demagogue named Chrestus, under whose instigation rioting occurred. He holds that the passage in Suetonius does not furnish the slightest proof that there were Christians in Rome, but the evidence in refutation of his opinion is adequate, though it cannot be discussed at length at this time.

It is altogether rational to suppose that there were Christians in Rome, and that both they and the Jews were affected by the edict of Claudius, due to the pagan ignorance of the differentiating qualities of the two sects. This view is substantiated by the fact that in pagan writing concerning the time of Claudius, as exemplified by Suetonius and Tacitus, the mention of the less-known Christians would likely disappear and that of the numerous and well-known Jews would remain, and hence the mention of the expulsion of the Jews, spoken of from a Roman viewpoint may well include many Christians. Hardy, quoting Mommsen (p.36) says: "Der Hass der Massen von den Juden auf die Christen sich uebertrug". After their expulsion, the Jews soon returned from their

exile in numbers to their transtiberine section of the city and many of the banished Christians also returned with them, but both were looked upon with suspicion. At this time, Christianity appeared to be the mere minutia of the Jewish sect, and since Judaism was recognized as a religio licita, the Christian organization, as a subsidiary, was allowed existence without molestation. This condition was not of long duration, however, because the bitter animosity of the Jews brought the Roman authorities to a realization that the followers of Jesus were the advocates of a new religion rather than an extreme party of the Jews. The situation rapidly took on a new aspect, so that "the hatred of the synagogues soon undeceived the Roman world, and persecution, instead of being, as hitherto, the work of the mob stirred up by Jewish gold, became the duty of the empire" (Workman, p. 56).

The Jews, themselves persecuting the Christians at every opportunity, made it plain that the Christians were no part of their organization. Uhlhorn, in accordance with one theory on this phase of the persecutions, extends this period of indiscriminate persecution between Jews and Christians to the time of Domitian, and states that the believers were up to this time involved in conflict because the heathen had not yet learned to differentiate

between the two beliefs.

In contrast to this view, evidence indicates that already at the time of Nero there was a definite distinction between the Judaistic and Christian bodies. Christianity, progressing steadily, could in view of its doctrines no longer possibly be taken as a form of Jewish belief. If Tacitus and Suetonius are correct in their statements concerning the time of Nero, as they indeed seem to be, it is evident that neither the government nor the populace held the Christians to be a Jewish sect. In this connection, the theory of Schiller and others, that the persecutions were directed against the Jews and that individual Christians may have been involved, is unlikely. Gibbon's interpretation that the persecution was aimed at Jews and Christians indiscriminately is not satisfying. The hostility of the Jews themselves brought about the distinction which already at the time of Nero was plainly drawn. That the Christians and Jews were still confused with each other by the Romans in 95 A.D., postulated chiefly by Neuman, on the basis of the statements of Dio Cassius, is not probable, because the evidence of historians available to us shows that there was a distinction between the two sects as early as 64. Ramsay, (p.266ff) refutes Neuman's view and accepts the date 64 as the

time when the Christians were distinguished from the Jews by the government and people. His argument from the alertness of the Roman police and governmental administration to detect any new sect, together with the testimony of Tacitus and Suetonius, is convincing. To this we may well add the thought that no intelligent student, knowing the large number of the Jews, that they comprised about seven per cent of the empire's population, would suppose that they would allow the sect which they hated and despised to be classified as one with them. The violent hatred of the Jews could not escape the wary eye of a well-organized governmental system. So the statement of Tacitus that the Christians at Rome at the time of Nero and the great fire were known as a religious body apart from the Jews is not impossible nor improbable. This will suffice, then, in consideration of the fact that at the time of Claudius and shortly after, the Christians were persecuted, being erroneously considered as Jews.

The incessant hatred and enmity of the Jews was also a cause for persecution.

Hostile to Christianity from its inception, as already noted, the opposition of the Jews to Christianity became more violent and determined when they perceived the better progress of Christianity. Every martyrdom

which they were able to effect was another victory for their cause. Christianity was distasteful to the Jews because it threatened the entire overthrow of Judaism. The Jews looked upon the Christians with the bitterest animosity, and persecuted them with all the means available to them, and even appealed to the Roman government against them. The hostility of the Jews to the Church exerted itself in various ways. They constantly incited the populace against the Christians and charged that, having no altars or sacrifices, they were atheists and dangerous to civilization. They stirred up the ill-will and hatred of the heathen by raising ugly rumors of immorality and cannibalism against the believers to such an extent that many of the Romans who had not previously taken a vehement stand against the new religion were incensed at the alleged enormity of their crimes, and agitated for a torture in kind, and a speedy death, so that their "evil" influence might not spread farther in the state. Canfield (p.48) holds that the Jews were also a leading factor in the persecutions under Nero. He accepts as a natural inference that the Jews, out of jealousy to the believers had stirred up the persecution. Quoting Clement in this connection, he admits that he does not know specifically to what the jealousy was due, and concludes that Clement takes for granted a knowledge

of the circumstances which we do not possess. The thought is by no means impossible, but cannot be accepted without more definite substantiation. Christians and Jews faced each other in the same cities, separated by a hatred that daily became more inflamed. Justin Martyr said: "The Jews treat us as open enemies, putting us to death and torturing us, just as you heathens do, whenever they can".

Tertullian calls the synagogues "sources of persecution".

In his Dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr asserts that also in his time the Jews in their synagogues cursed all that believed in Christ.

(ΚΑΤΑ ΤΡΥΦΕΥΟΝ ΕΝ ΤΑΙΣ

ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΑΙΣ ὄρων τοὺς πιστευόντας ἐπὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) Lard-

ner I.71). He tells the Jews that no other people was

so instrumental in bringing hatred and persecution up-

on the Christians as they. Tertullian states essentially

the same truth: Et credidit vulgus Judaeo. Quod enim

aliud genus seminarium est infamiae nostrae? -Tert. ad Nat.

bk. 1, chap. 14, L I, 172). This shows that the Jews with

their enmity and false accusations were no insignificant

cause contributing to the persecution and misery of the

Christians.

Nor did the Jews confine their efforts alone to inciting

the people with words. In all persecutions in Asia at

least, the activity of the Jews may be seen in the back-

ground of the martyrdoms. As a typical example of their

activity, Eusebius records that they actually helped to bring wood for the funeral-pyres of the martyrs. The example of Polycarp is outstanding: "The crowd, forthwith collected wood and straw from the shops and baths, especially the Jews, as usual, offered their services for this purpose. (Hist. Ec. bk. 14, chap. 15, p. 135). We may, therefore well ascribe this hostile activity of the Jews as a potent cause for the persecutions.

Christianity was not a lawful religion, nor was it a national religion.

Another cause for the persecution of the early Christians is the fact that Christianity was not a lawful religion since it was not a national religion. While Rome exercised a toleration of foreign religions, the laws against them were nevertheless very strict. A statement of Cicero (De Leg. II, 8) exists in which he cites the ordinance forbidding anyone to have gods separately or to worship new or foreign gods privately, before they had been publicly and legally sanctioned. Livy states that foreign rites were taboo when practised in some public or sacred place. (Neu quis in publico sacrove loco, novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret, Hist. XXV, 1). The apparent disagreement of these two statements may be explained by the fact that Cicero presents the actual

legal status and Livy the usual mode of procedure. In the light of these laws, Christianity was from the beginning a prohibited religion, and while laws (as suggested by Livy's statement above) may not have been rigorously enforced, they were nevertheless expressive against Christianity, and a religion without the sanction and protection of the state was naturally liable to the attacks of individuals and populace as well. Until Christianity should receive official recognition, those who practised it were subject to all manner of pains and penalties. The remark of Tertullian is then explained, when he says that one of the early heathen taunts against the believers was "non licet vos esse" (the law does not permit you to exist). I cannot incline to the sentiment of Merrill (p. 74ff) who refers this statement of Tertullian to include only the essence of the magistrates' attitude toward Christianity, or as quoting "the petulant ejaculation of a single judge in a moment of disgust at the intractable bearing of the defendant before him". The expression is rather a summary of the attitude of the government and people toward the Christians at the time. As long as Christianity was held to be merely a branch of the Jewish body, it was allowed to continue, but when it was declared to be a separate and distinct religion, it was outlawed.

This may lead to the query as to why Christianity did not seek immunity from attack by legal protection as had other religions. The Roman idea that religion was a matter of race rather than of conviction proved the obstacle to this end. Christianity was not a national religion. The Roman religion was intrinsically and essentially a national religion; the safety of the state was its chief object, and the worship of the gods was the antecedent and necessary condition of its object. The Jews were bound together by close national ties, but could because of their religion not become Roman citizens, properly speaking. They were therefore looked upon as a nationality, having a national belief; and, being classed as "incolae", were conceded the free exercise of their national religion. They were tolerated with contempt generally, but the validity of their nationality, in the Roman mind, as a basis for unmolestation in matters religious was allowed. However debasing and absurd their rites might be in the opinion of the government, they were at liberty to celebrate their services in Rome or the Roman possessions in accordance with the toleration policy granted to foreign religions, as long as they did not become obnoxious or rebellious. Judaism was therefore a religio licita for the Jews, and the God of Israel was looked upon by many as a pow-

erful national deity.

Such was not the case with the Christians,- they were charged with contriving to appear as a Jewish sect so that they might slip in under the cover of a tolerated religion. With Christianity there was no ancient or national form of worship as in other religions, and it was considered as a defection from a religio licita and a rebellion against the venerable Jewish faith. Christianity was by its own admission and claim a universal religion, a faith for all nations, and it appeared to the heathen anti-national and a dangerous faction in the state. To the pagan mind a universality of faith was something entirely incomprehensible. This thought, a typical sentiment, finds expression by Celsus: "The Jews are not to be blamed, because each man ought to live according to the custom of his country, but the Christians have forsaken the national rites for the doctrine of Christ" (τὰ πατρίκια καταλιπόντας καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῇ τυγχάνοντες ἕενος ὡς οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι -Origen, Contra Celsum, V.25). This remark embraces the general opinion against the Christians. Had they adopted the Roman rites or been willing to have Jesus assumed into the category of Roman deities the peaceful progress of their teaching would no doubt have been assured as far as the matter concerned the state. In the first three

centuries after Christ, the period with which we are concerned, the conceptions of state and religion were co-existent and synonymous. The entire scheme of life was based on the theory that each god protected exclusively some state or family and took no interest in any other. Christianity was the antithesis of this. It was not the religion of any family, caste, or tribe, and had neither political nor national characteristics. It ignored race and nationality and postulated a universality of doctrine and scope of its appeal. Had Christianity claimed that it was a tribal religion or the national belief of some people, its claims would not have met at first with such decided opposition. As it was, the new teaching was looked upon at first with derision, later with fear. The Christians were persecuted then, their religion being looked upon as a defection from the national religion and the Jewish religion, an anarchistic attempt at a universality of their religious belief to the exclusion of all others.

With Nero, the policy of treating Christianity as a defection from the national religion originated, and this attitude was looked upon by later emperors as a precedent. Scholars now are in general agreement that it had become a settled policy of the emperors by the time of Domitian to treat Christianity itself as a crime, but

the principle itself is of earlier origin and dates from the time of Nero. The principle laid down by Nero, according to Ramsay, was merely unwritten law according to which the governors judged cases set before them, following the precedent set by the emperor. After Nero, the policy was continued and no doubt amplified in detail by the later emperors as a matter of imperial policy. The old Roman idea that a religion must be national and a matter of race rather than of conviction, inbred into the emperors, would explain, for example, the ill-treatment of the Christians by Marcus Aurelius, otherwise alluded to as a humane man. The laxity of persecution by some of the later emperors would then also be illuminated by the fact that they were no longer so thoroughly imbued with the old Roman spirit of state and nationalism. I am, however, not of the opinion that at the time of Nero there were definite laws against the Christians on the specific charge of esse Christianum. Tertullian's statement, usually quoted in this connection, is absolutely no proof that there was a definite law issued by Nero proscribing Christianity. This question will be later considered in connection with Trajan.

The very essence of Christianity, universal as it was,

militated against a coordination with the heathen rites and a national religion even in the smallest way. The situation was from the beginning one of antagonism and unflinching opposition, the struggle to the death between the forces of paganism and the one true religion.

Christianity was looked upon as stubborn opposition to the laws of the empire.

According to the Roman notion, the state was the one all-embracing society which must include every interest and activity of its subjects, -religious, social, and political. Christianity was a society with a life all its own, and as such there was no room for its existence in Roman law. The Church refused to worship the local gods and the emperor, and was therefore looked upon as a form of stubborn resistance and rebellion to the laws of the empire. As long as the state was constituted as it was, Christianity must as a matter of necessity be opposed to it, and so was really a hostile power to the state. The motive of persecuting believers to force them to submission to the established laws was indeed a far more powerful one than was that of attempting their conversion to pagan belief. The emperors were fighting for the life and existing order of the state. Marcus Aurelius gave expression to an analagous

thought when he asserted that " the end of rational animals is to follow the reason and law of the most ancient city and polity". The refusal of the Christians to respect and conform to the worship of the national gods was characterized as obstinatio, or political disobedience. The characteristic of the new religion which to Pliny seemed most worthy and necessary of punishment was this obstinatio, as shown in the principle of obeying God rather than men. Since Christianity was not considered a national religion, the refusal to worship the gods of the empire placed its adherents in the category of law-breakers. The Roman statesmen, having no conception of conscience or its rights, saw in the Christian only a blind and unbending obstinacy to the existing laws.

The close brotherhood and organization of the Christians aroused fears that they might become dangerous, a force for anarchy. A lively dread of every organization and thing that might have a political aim and tendency prevailed on the part of the emperors. In this way, religious societies, too, seemed in the suspicious eye of the government a cover for political plots and intrigues. The intimate brotherhood of the Christians, which bound them inseparably, was something utterly incomprehensible to the ordinary man, and the Roman police, as Neander observes, were

unable to fathom the nature of the bond which united the Christians. They saw therein a united movement against prevailing law and order. Emperors lived in constant fear of bodies and associations which might plot against them. This characteristic was prominent in Trajan. Pliny, governor of Bythnia-Pontus, in line with the emperor's policy, had published an edict prohibiting assemblies and societies, and we may see from correspondence between Pliny and Trajan to what extent assemblies were prohibited. A great conflagration in Nicomedia in Bythnia had consumed many buildings. Because of this Pliny made the proposal that a college of smiths (fire-fighters) "consisting of one hundred and fifty" be established, adding that, as the organization would be of so small a number, it would be an easy matter to keep its members under surveillance and control. In his reply, the emperor stated that no matter what name would be given to the organization, it would still be an assembly, no matter how short its meetings were, and hence would be a source of danger. (Quodcunque nomen, ex quacunque causa dederimus iis qui in idem contracti fuerint, hetaeriae quamvis breves fient. Ep. 43) This example, as well as others, shows how jealous and careful of organized societies the emperors were.

Hardy makes the claim (p.118) that the emperors did not regard Christianity as a political danger, stating that there would have been a much more definitely defined policy of persecution had such been the case. Merrill (p.57) states essentially the same thing, but Ramsay's view that Christianity was regarded as a serious and practical danger to the social and political foundations of the state even from the time of Nero is more logical and in accordance with evidence such as that embodied in the correspondence of Pliny and Trajan.

Under some emperors the Christians were dealt with more severely as *collegia illicita* than by others. All *collegia* were forbidden, except the Jewish bodies and some others specially exempted by law. It is unwarranted to assume on the other hand, as many do, that all *collegia illicita* were persecuted. Burial clubs and mutual aid societies, while they were unlicensed, were unmolested. With Christianity the issue was one of a different nature, and it was not that it was a *collegium illicitum* that it was prohibited especially, but rather that it appeared as a body with political and anarchistic tendencies.

Other reasons for the persecution of the Christians suggest themselves in this connection. The Christians were charged as being atheistic, seditions, and anarchistic.

This view was held with varying severity from the time of Nero until the end of the conflict under Constantine. The charge of atheism and anarchism had one ill-effect on the believers, namely, that it put them beyond the pale of the law and placed them under the arbitrary and vacillating jurisdiction of magistrates and the Eirenarchae. The Roman was not unjust from his own viewpoint in his charge that the Christians were atheists. They were *θεοίοι* ("men without gods"), proclaiming that the heathen gods were demons of wood and stone, and that there was but one true God. Such an attitude of unheard-of monotheism which reduced the national gods to the rank of devils could appear as nothing else than the rankest atheism. Under Hadrian and later emperors, the atheism of Christianity was often brought under the head of the crime of maiestas. The contempt for the national gods was atheism, high treason even, and the testimony of such atheism was a crime punishable to the full extent of the law. The charge of maiestas was quite inclusive, and any aspersion on the "gods of the Roman people", easily construed as an insult and an attack on the government, could without much ado be included under the charge of maiestas. Profumo's view, made public in 1905, is unique. He holds that Tertullian's phrase "institutum Neronianum" refers to the three crimes immorality, sacrilege or atheism, and maiestas.

tas. By a rule of evidence called *institutum*, the three crimes had become so intimately associated that the proof of one charge furnished legally the proof of a state of mind which implied guilt of the other two. The guilt of the Christians was usually proven by their refusal to sacrifice. Hardy characterizes the early Christians as fanatics in the popular opinion and says that many of their Nihilistic ideas (i.e., the approaching end of the world, and the second coming of Christ) involved a restlessness which was not compatible with the ordinary duties and bearing of a loyal subject of the empire. While the expression is perhaps a trifle strong, it nevertheless contains a goodly element of truth. To the Romans they did appear as anarchists. It is certainly true that Marcus Aurelius, philosopher and Stoic, regarded them as the propounders of an absurd and fanatical superstition. The absence of altars, temples, and sacrificial rites in the Christian worship fostered the charge of atheism. That this charge was a well-known one and widely-circulated is shown by the fact that the usual cry of rage on the part of the populace when persecution was rife was "Away with the atheists!". It must be emphasized here again that the issue was not entirely a religious one, but since religion and the government were so vitally connected, the situation was also of a political nature.

The Roman view of Christianity is well illustrated in the letters of Pliny and Trajan, which are the most important documents bearing upon the treatment of the Christians by the authorities. The letter of Pliny to Trajan is outstanding because, rich in detail, it describes the manner in which the Christians were dealt with, and a reference to its contents at this point is in order. The substance of the communication is this: Pliny reports to Trajan in the year 113 that some of his subjects in Bythnia have been accused of being Christians. Upon investigation he finds some to be guilty, and then he orders executed. He also finds that the number of Christians in his territory is very large, and suggests that by patient treatment many may be turned away from the "pernicious superstition". The emperor's reply approves of the course which Pliny had pursued and gives advice to be followed in future instances.

Pliny's letter proves that the Christians were then well known in the world and also shows that he was aware that the Christians were being executed in other parts of the Roman world. He states that he is in doubt as to the course to pursue in dealing with the Christians, and this is significant because it proves that he had not before taken charge of such trials, and was doubtful on the meth-

od of procedure, because there was no settled law on the matter, except the general policy and principle of the emperors and the laws regarding new and foreign religions. Perplexing questions arose in his mind, such as : Should discrimination be made in punishments because of old age or youth? Should those who repented be pardoned? Is the crime to be punished because of the mere fact that one is a Christian? This demonstrates that Pliny himself was not familiar with such trials of the Christians, but does not establish, as Hardy states, that the trials of the Christians had been neither frequent nor important, since Pliny was at a loss how to proceed. In his examination of the accused, Pliny was able to discover nothing beyond " a . bad and excessive superstition". He saw in their inflexibility an obstinatio against the government. The letter of Pliny is of note because it establishes the fact that before Trajan there was no express law or formal edict specifically against the Christians. The Christians were judged by Pliny by virtue of his authority, the imperium delegated to him as to the governor of a province who had the power of searching out and punishing evildoers. Christians had previously been classed as outlaws, as has been shown, and the admission of the Name "Christian" in itself entailed condemnation. They were condemned before the edict of Trajan, as well as later, on this charge.

Another point of note emphasized by this document is that Pliny's treatment of the Christians was not arbitrary, but rather in conformity with a settled principle of imperial policy, and a definite mode of procedure^{which} had established itself through use and repetition. Governors and emperors in succession, under the impression that Christianity was against the general law and order of the state, acting on the same law-and-order impulse, had brought about a general procedure which in time had all the force and authority of a legal precedent. This fact substantiates previous statements made in this paper that there were no specific laws against the Christians as such, but that a general policy based on precedent established by Nero and amplified by later emperors decided the treatment of the Christians. The letter also seems to indicate that while, in conformity with his office of emperor, Trajan carried out the principle, he was personally opposed to it, as is evidenced by the fact that he advised Pliny to give no heed to anonymous charges and to punish false informers. He displays his policy of humanity also by stating that accused persons who might recant should be released unharmed.

With the edict of Trajan, a definitely stated measure and policy was established in regard to the Christians, which

regulated the treatment of Christians for more than a century. It must be allowed that from the Roman view the edict is in conformity with the clemency usually associated with Trajan, and the humane element is not lacking. Christianity was a stubborn opposition to the laws of the empire and as such should be dealt with, though with all possible modifications of mercy, and the case should be handled as a dealing with mildly deluded people who had been led astray. Workman does not accept the edict of Trajan as inaugurating a new policy of persecution against the Christians. He points out that Trajan's aim was to change a policy which had caused much suffering to harmless fanatics, stating that Trajan expressly refuses to lay down a general policy which may serve as a fixed rule of procedure. This refusal to inaugurate a "fixed rule" would seem rather an indication that sentence should be passed on individual cases after they had been given special and individual attention and examination. While Trajan with his sense of Roman justice would not allow the obstinacy of the Christians to pass altogether, his whole policy is manifestly one of justice tempered with humanity. Hardy adopts a sort of middle position and states that if the rescript of Trajan is not important as laying down a new or imperial policy with regard to the Christians, it nevertheless furnishes us with the first authentic evid-

dence of the view of the government on Christianity (p.98)

Christians were persecuted out of hatred, being falsely charged with crimes they had never committed.

The most outstanding case of this nature is the imputation by Nero of the guilt of having set fire to Rome upon the Christians. In the tenth year of Nero's reign, according to Tacitus, there happened a great fire at Rome. Nero was suspected of having set it himself. History indicates that he was probably not at Rome at the time of the fire, but at Antium, and that he returned only when the blaze threatened the royal buildings. The point of the matter which touches the Christians vitally as a cause for persecution is that fact that the report was circulated that the fire was due to Nero's orders. The report found ready ears with the people, and the ugly rumor spread rapidly. "To suppress the common rumor, Nero procured others to be accused and inflicted exquisite punishments upon those people, who were in abhorrence for their crimes, and were more commonly known by the name of Christians" (Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos, te exquisitissimis peonis affecit quos per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat. - Tac. Ann. 15, 44) By this statement, Tacitus intimates that the Christians were generally hated for the crimes imputed to them. Nero's charges were only a pretext for placing his guilt upon

those who were already in disfavor with the populace, and whose words of vindication would avail them nothing. Tacitus continues: "But neither all human help, nor the liberality of the emperor, nor all the atonements presented to the gods availed to abate the infamy he lay under of having ordered the city to be set on fire". (Sed non ope humana, non largitionibus Principis, aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia, quin jussum incendium crederetur. - Tac. Ann. 15, 44)

Under the charge of incendiarism placed upon the Christians "there began a carnival of blood such as even heathen Rome never saw before or since". Nero's persecutions were so manifestly acts of hatred and an attempt to cover his crimes by charging them to the innocent Christians that the Roman people themselves began to have sympathy with them, and to believe that they were being destroyed not with a view to public welfare, but only to satisfy the cruelty of one man. (----miseratio oriebatur tanquam non utilitate publica, sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur. Tac. Ann. 15:44) The later account of Sulpicius Severus agrees with that of Tacitus. He, too, states that the guilt for the conflagration was ascribed to the Christians by Nero in an effort to clear himself, and that his tortures were the more severe in an attempt to make his conduct and actions seem sincere. He says:

"Sed opinio omnium invidiam incendii in Principem re-
torquebat.-----Neque ulla re Nero efficiebat,quin ab
eo jussum incendium putaretur. Igitur vertit invidiam in
Christianos, actaeque in innoxios crudelissimae quaestio-
es" Sul. Severus. Sac. Hist. 2, 41) In this connection, Can-
field is inclined to doubt the accuracy of Tacitus, be-
cause of the silence of other contemporaries on the
charge of incendiarism. He holds, on the basis of Sue-
tonius (Nero 16) that the Christians were suppressed as
a police measure, perhaps because of supposed immorality
or for some other reason which would characterize them
as intolerable. The view of Ramsay, that in the absence
of many sources, we use those available and make the
best of them, seems to be the answer to Canfield's ob-
jection here.

It has been suggested by Arnold that some of the Christ-
ians under examination confessed themselves guilty of
the crime which they had never committed. This would
naturally give the impression that the Christians had
conspired to fire the city. [✓] One this "confession" was
established, the conviction that the hated people had
started the fire would gain popular credence and approval
and from this point the matter was not difficult. It
would now only be necessary to convict Christians of
being Christians to obtain the death sentence. This may

have been the case, but a better interpretation is that which Hardy favors, and which seems to be not quite so forced as that of Ramsay. The Christians had been singled out as men obnoxious to the people, on whom Nero would shift the charge of incendiariism. The charge of arson broke down in the course of the trials, but at the same time much information concerning the Christians, just as useful to Nero, which would indicate on the part of the Christians a frame of mind of which arson and destruction would be the outcome, was discovered. This seems to be quite fitting. The Christians were held first on a charge of arson and when that fell through in the courts enough had been discovered about them in the way of evil reports and rumors to convict them, in an attempt to make Nero's action seem justified. The theory of the Italian, Paschal, is extreme. He considers the Christians as the true authors of the fire and concludes that they had really carried out the incendiary orders of Nero, and his whole theory is manifestly warped and untenable. The persecution was not a carefull-y planned and premeditated effort at extirpating Christianity, based on a civil or religious principle or policy, but only an explosion of hatred, a convenient agency on Nero's part for diverting public accusation from himself, and action which was, however, looked upon by later regents as a

precedent in imperial policy. Most scholars maintain that the persecution was simply an act of violence by Nero, short of duration and limited to the city of Rome. This is the only view that can be upheld by the evidence of original sources.

Similarly, in the year 177, the Christians in Lyons and Vienne in southern France were unjustly persecuted for crimes which they had never perpetrated. Heathen slaves were compelled by torture to declare that their owners were guilty of the immoral crimes which were commonly rumored against them, and this procedure was resorted to only to justify the tortures which were being inflicted upon the Christians.

An incident of the same character occurred under Diocletian, when Galerius employed private incendiaries to set the royal palace ablaze. His plan was partially successful and the blame was laid upon the Christians, so that "the very appellation of Christians grew odious on account of that fire". It was claimed that the Christians, together with the eunuchs, had plotted to destroy the royalty. Diocletian did not detect the plot, but began an investigation by torture to establish the blame for the fire. Starting with the domestics of his own household, his persecutions soon included presbyters and

officers of the Church, who, together with their families, were executed, often without evidence or conviction. (Lactantius, How the Persecutors Died, XII-XV).

Domitian developed and fostered the practise of encouraging informers to remove under various pretences those who had come under his notice and suspicion as dangerous characters or as objects of his greed, and the charge of Christianity was interpreted as that of treason with the subsequent death sentence.

Eusebius records another specific instance of false charges brought against the Christians through hatred, with resultant punishment and torture. The incident occurred about 303 in Damascus, and is recorded thus: "While those things were yet doing, a military officer, whom the Romans call Dux, fetched some infamous women from the marketplace, whom by threatenings he compelled to declare and testify in writing (*λεγειν ἐγγράφως*) that they had formerly been Christians and that they were acquainted with their worship----- and everything else which he required them to say for defaming our religion". (Bk. 9, chap. 5, p. 165, Greek. Ed.). It was not an uncommon practise for magistrates and officials to force especially women to confess, truthfully or otherwise, that they had been Christians, and to recite enormities and infamous prac-

tices which they alleged the Christians engaged in, whereupon persecution and punishments were taken up anew against the believers. Eusebius also mentions the torturing, unsuccessfully, of a certain Biblias in an effort to force her to utter impious things against the Christians. (bk.5,1).Pliny examined by torture two maid-servants (deaconesses) in an attempt to force from them evidence which would incriminate the Christians. His efforts discovered nothing more than "a bad and excessive superstition",as he himself writes in his report to Emperor Trajan. The same letter records that the Christians were unjustly accused by informers who brought false charges against them.(Alii ab indice nominati),

This demonstrates, then, that many Christians were persecuted and tortured on the basis of false charges of crimes and wrongs which they had never committed, simply out of hatred.

Popular Hatred caused Persecution.

A cause for persecution whose importance cannot be overlooked is the enmity of the populace against the Christians. Hatred of the Christians was not so pronounced among the aristocracy as among the lower class. To the rich, the new sect was for the most part but another of the petty disturbances of the rabble,not important

enough to disturb their peacefulness of life. To the poor the question was a different one. Living crowded together with the Christians, a certain hostility was aroused by the sanctimonious, and to the heathen, ostentatiously good conduct, of their Christian neighbors. Their absence from public and religious fetes and gatherings marked them as those who would rob life of its joy. The believers seemed as "men dead to the world". The charge of atheism, already alluded to, was a common one among the people. Ugly rumors of cannibalism and the secrecy of their rites, when other religious services were open to inspection, created suspicion. Caecilius characterizes the Christians as a "people skulking and shunning the light, silent in public, but garrulous in corners", who "despise the temples as charnel houses".

The solicitude of the followers of Christ for their salvation was something unintelligible to the heathen, and their statements concerning final judgement and eternal punishment for man were held to be evidence of their hatred for their fellow men.

All these accusations served only to increase hatred and rage against them. The situation finally reached such a state that all calamities were laid to their charge. Earthquakes and other disturbances of the elements were judged

to be manifestations of the anger of the gods at the spread of the new sect. The proverb had come into use in northern Africa, according to Augustine: Non pluit deus, due ad Christianos, (If there is no rain, lay it to the blame of the Christians), and at every famine or pestilence the cry of hatred arose "Away with the atheists, to the lions with the Christians!"

Maximinus the Thracian (235-238) allowed the popular rage against the Christians full sway, this time incited by an earthquake. Nero capitalized this feeling against Christianity when he placed on its proponents the charges which led to their martyrdom. For the most part, the persecutions in the provinces were due to the hatred and violence of the people.

It must not be inferred, however, that purely religious hatred was the strongest cause for the persecution of the Christians. The situation is better viewed in the aspect of a social or social-religious revolution. Ramsay says: "The ordinary pagan did not care two straws whether his neighbors worshipped twenty gods or twenty-one" (p. 130), but the fact that the believers did not mingle in public or private life with their neighbors, and their aloofness from heathen thought and activities invoked a hate against them and aggravated persecution, which broke out whenever opportunity afforded.

Another ground of offence and violence against the Christians is found in the fact that they drew men away from the worship of the heathen gods. The temples began to be not so much frequented as formerly. The priests and all who depended upon the temples for a livelihood, -the sacrificers, image makers, engravers, sorcerers, and others were deprived of their usual revenue. This condition made fierce enemies for the Christians. An early instance of this kind is on record in the Book of Acts 19:23 (Paul and Demetrius). There was no lack of infuriated individuals to incite persecution against the Christians. It is said of Alexander of Abonoteichus, the prominent magician at the time of Marcus Aurelius, that when his performances had failed to elicit enthusiasm or create sensation in different places, he called upon the mob to stone the Christians, in order that the anger of the gods might be averted. Every performance was preceded by the statement: "If any atheist, Christian, or Epicurean has slipped in as a spy, let him begone!". Such animosity was not without tangible effect on the Christians, and recourse by magicians and others whose interests were being retarded by the Christian influence to popular violence against them seems to have been not unusual.

The Christians were charged with practising magic.

The superstition of the heathen people placed upon the

Christians the accusation that they employed magical arts. Historical data is meagre on this point, but it is nevertheless certain that the charge was prevalent. The secrecy of the Christian services and the rumors of child-murder would well coincide with the prevalent rumors of magic and witchcraft. It is significant to note that Suetonius' characterization of Christianity as "malifica" otherwise often has this special connotation as of practicing magic. The Justinian laws call magicians "inimici generis humani" and this sentiment was also applied against the believers, but too much emphasis on these last two arguments is unwarranted.

The heathen believed that the disasters of nature were due to the magic powers of the Christians and that their black arts affected even the workings of supernatural things, since the Christians openly spoke of their power over demons and impious spirits. Eusebius would lead us to believe that the Christians performed miracles and wonders (bk.5, ch.7). Marcian is quoted as having said to the martyr Achatius: "Where are your magicians, your teachers in this jugglery?". Some historians find in the treatment of the Christians by Nero an apparent parallel and evidence of the charge of magic. It was the rule, according to these authorities, that sorcerers and magicians were to be burnt alive, while those who had merely aided

Magical practices were condemned to die by the beasts or by crucifixion. Nero combined the two forms of torture, as already described, by exposing some of the Christians to the dogs to be torn up, and causing others to be crucified and burnt. This seems to be more likely a consummation of all the forms of cruelty and torture which Nero could devise rather than an actual judicial sentence against magical practices on the part of the Christians. That persecution was due entirely to condemnation on the specific charge of magic is unlikely, though it would be an element not to be overlooked in the hatred of the Romans for the Christians.

Celsus, quoted by Origen, asserts that the Christians "were well skilled in the names and invocations of ceratin daemons", that he saw presbyters with books in a barbarous language, containing the names of demons, and other charms, and that they professed nothing but things hurtful to mankind. (Contra Celsum 6,401). At the time, this was urged as a reason for the undesirability of the Christians and for their persecution, but the matter is too inadequately attested for a certain judgement on the question. It has been suggested that Celsus refers to the expelling of demons in the name of Jesus and to other miraculous acts which are ascribed to some of the early Christians. The charge of magic against the Christians

which seems here to be not more than a forced argument of Celsus' own invention, no doubt found a following among the populace.

The believers were charged with holding secret meetings at night with a view to indulging in all nature of immorality and unnatural crimes.

Another cause for hatred and persecution against the early believers was the charge that they held secret meetings at night and in the early morning before it was light. The misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the Christian rites seized the popular mind with a vehemence of aversion that allowed no reasoning or explanation and resisted all argument. It is quite true, as Workman points out (p.157), that these charges of immorality were due in part to the secrecy of the Christians, a necessary result of the aloofness or renunciation which underlay their faith.

The misunderstanding and unholy interpretation of the Christian terms also formed a basis for charges of moral turpitude. The "kiss of peace", instituted by Saint Paul, was interpreted as an indication of promiscuous affection. The term "love-feast", together with the fact that the meetings were held just before dawn or in the night hours and were not open to the gaze of the curious offered opportunity to those who would to raise gross charges against the Christians. Night was likely chosen

as a time of worship out of necessity when they had been disturbed at their devotion by their enemies, the people or government officials. The Christians held their services in private houses and this fact cast a shade of mystery and suspicion upon them. The make-up and state of society like that in Rome and the Oriental cities would certainly credit anything like a secret worship with immoralities. The very simplicity of Christian worship would arouse suspicion in the heathen mind. The love-feasts soon came to be known as festivities held for the purpose of cloaking immorality and inhumanity under the name of religion.

Rumors of immorality were no doubt of Jewish origin and were heard in Rome even at the time of Nero. Suspicions of incest and infanticide were aroused by the charges of the Jews. That this supposition was groundless is needless to say, but it must be borne in mind that such a condition obtained in other religions at various times; for example, the Egyptian Isis cult which at the time of Augustus was ordered beyond the suburbs of Rome, whose temple was demolished and the statue of Isis cast into the Tiber, because of the prevalent immoralities and corrupting influences of the Egyptian priests. Three charges came to be urged against the Christians; cannibalism, incest, and atheism. It was rumored that in their night sessions

the Christians killed children and ate them, and that later, when the lights had been extinguished, they practised promiscuous lewdness, and unbridled lust was rampant. Origen charges that the Jews accused the Christians of such enormities (C. Celsum, bk. 6. - *ὡς ἄρα καταθυσάντες παιδίον, μεταλαμβάνουσι αὐτοῦ τῶν σαρκῶν καὶ πάλιν ὅτι οἱ ἀπο τοῦ λόγου τῆ τοῦ σκοτοῦ πράττειν βουλομένοι σβεννύουσι μὲν τοφῶς ἐκωσῆς δὲ τῆ πῆρατοχουση) ^{μ. γγνυταί.}*

Caecilius relates the commonly-accepted idea that when novices were to be admitted to the Christian assemblies, a child was covered with meal "to deceive the unwary", and the novice plunged a knife into the body of the child again and again in the belief that he was stabbing a large lump of meal. Then, according to the heathen notion, the assembled flesh-eaters licked up the warm blood, tore the child to pieces and devoured the still-palpitating flesh. The device of having a dog tied to the candelabra who, when provoked with a piece of meat, jumping, would overturn the candle-holder and plunge the room into darkness, upon which all manner of immorality followed, - a typical charge against the Christians, - is ingenious and certainly one which by its novelty would gain the fancy and credence of the populace.

The Christian sacraments were totally misunderstood. The ideas of baptism and the eucharist were hopelessly con-

fused and tangled in the popular view into all nature of unnatural sin and practises. Bringing children to the place of meeting for baptism was looked upon in the light of infanticide, and it was thought that the bread of the Holy Supper was used to sop up the blood of the murdered children. The words of Christ "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in yourselves" seemed a command to eat human flesh and drink the blood of one's fellow-man with a view to securing immortality. It is small wonder, then, that a people, fed up with such horrifying tales, should have cause for hatred and should persecute the Christians, who seemed to them to be fanatic cannibals.

This notion of Christian immorality was quite common, and this is indicated by a writing of Apuleius (164ca.) wherein, under the picture of a Christian woman whom he charges with immorality, he allegorically alludes to the Christians, who at that time celebrated their religious meetings and rites, especially the eucharist in the early morning, and intimates that they, too, practised immorality in their night sessions. Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Minucius Felix, and Tertullian mention in their writings that the believers were charged with having their wives in common, with incest, with eating human flesh, which they had first slaughtered

and which was eaten in their nocturnal assemblies where were present persons of each sex and all ages. (See notes appended, page 51a).

Eusebius quotes an instance of this alleged accusation:

"And some of the servants who were heathens were seized because the governor had ordered that we should all be examined in public. These by the wiles of Satan, fearing the tortures which they saw the saints suffering, and urged by the soldiers to do this, accused us of Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean incests (* See page 51a) and of deeds of which it is not lawful for us to speak of, and which we do not think men ever committed. When these accusations were reported, all raged like wild beasts against us, so that even those who previously had restrained themselves on account of kinship, then became exceedingly enraged and gnashed their teeth against us". (ΚΑΤΕΨΕΥΘΑΝΤΟ ἡμῶν ΘΥΕΣΤΕΙΑ ΔΕΙΠΝΑ ΚΑΙ

Οἰδιποδείους μίξεις καὶ ὅσα ἔτε ἀλλεῖν ἔτε νοεῖν ὀφεί-
ῃεν) - Eus. bk. 5, chap. 1, p. 11, Gr. Ed).

These charges were manifestly untrue and but a figment of the imagination, but they served their purpose as causes for inciting the popular hatred against the Christians. We know that the early Church was not perfect, but at its worst it did not deserve charges of this character. These indictments of immorality on the part

Notes.-

Tertullian:

Dicimur sceleratissimi, de sacramento infanticidii, et pabulo inde, et post convivium incesto; quod eversores luminum canes, lenones scilicet, tenebras, tum et libidinum impiarum inverecundiam procurent.-
Tertullian, Apol. chap. 7

Minucius Felix:

Ad epulas solemnibus die coeunt, cum omnibus liberis, sororibus matribus, sexus omnis homines, et omnis aetatis. Illic post multas epulas, ubi convivium caluit, et incestae libidinis fervor ebrietate exarsit, canis qui candelabro nexus est, jactu offulae... ad impetum et saltum provocatur. Sic everso et extincto conscio lumine, impudentibus tenebris nexus infandae cupiditatis involvunt perincertum fortis. Et si non omnes opera, conscientia tamen pariter incesti; quoniam voto universorum appetitur, quicquid accidere potest in actu singulorum.-Min. Fel. chap. IX

Justin Martyr:

ΕΙ ΔΕ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΔΥΣΦΗΚΑ ἘΚΕΙΝΑ ΜΥΘΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ἜΡΓΑ ΠΡΑΤΤΟΥΣΙ, ΛΥΧΝΙΑΣ ΜΕΝ ἈΝΑΤΡΟΠΗΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΣ ἌΝΕΘΗΝ ΜΙΞΕΙΣ, ΚΑΙ ἌΝΘΡΩΠΕΙΩΝ ΣΑΡΚΩΝ ΒΟΡΑΣ, Οὐ ΓΙΝΩΣΚΟΜΕΝ-
Apology I.

μη και ὕψεις πεπιστευκατε περι κρων οτι δη εσοιομεν ανθρωπους, και μετα την ειλαπινην αποσβεννυντες τους λυχνους ἀθεομοις μιξεσιν εγκληιορεθα - Dialog. Tr.

Athenagoras:

Τρια επιφυμιζουσιν ημιν εγκληματα, ἀθεοτητα, θυεσταια δειπνα, οιδοπεικτα μιξεεις - Athen. Leg.

(These passages quoted from Lardner, Vol. 9, p. 240)

*Thyestes, according to mythology, ate part of his own son. Oedipus, in ignorance, slew his father, and married his mother Jocasta.

of the heathen are unfair. Fortunately we have also testimonies of heathen authors in numbers to attest to the good character of the Christians.

Tertullian's writings indicate that at his time such charges were not laid to the Christians as those of which their adversaries in the first century accused them. He shows the entire incredibility of the charge of infanticide by mentioning some of the Christian regulations in common use in the early times, namely that the eating of blood mixed with food was not allowed, and that the Christians abstained from the eating of things which had died of themselves or had been strangled. (Erubescat error vester Christianis, qui ne animalium quidem sanguinem in epulis esculentis habemus, qui propterea quoque suffocatis et morticinis abstinemus, ne quo modo sanguine contaminemur, vel intra viscera sepulto..... Porre quale est, ut quos sanguinem pecoris horrere confiditis humano inhiare credatis. -Tertullian, Ap. bk. 9)

The Economic Situation. Christianity was a departure from existing conditions. Christian exclusiveness one of the most important causes for persecution.

A final cause for the persecutions is found in the fact that Christianity overthrew all existing conventions and institutions, and in its exclusiveness. This characteristic of the new belief soon made Rome, government and

people, realize that the issue was one that must be followed to the bitter end. Christianity was a social revolution, a bloodless rebellion which aimed at and succeeded in overthrowing existing conventions of life. Men began to see that Christianity had no intention of taking a position in common with other religions, but that it vowed to destroy them relentlessly and to overcome all opposition to its final supremacy. Existing conditions of life were diametrically opposed to the aims and policy of Christianity. Especially abhorrent and untelligible were the Christian ideas of morality, religion, and the equality of men. This exclusiveness may be traced through the causes previously considered as a condition and reason for persecution ever-present.

In the matter of morality and the sex question, Christianity was far superior and purer than its contemporary religious systems. Its somewhat communistic ideas, especially the teaching of the equality of all men, were a radical departure from the established order of things. The strong emphasis on celibacy and a life devoted to God, exemplified by examples as that of Paul and Thekla, was distasteful to the heathen mind. The tendency to discourage marriage and elevate celibacy as a desirable state was fostered by many Christians, and when marriage was allowed, any union with the heathen was prohibited, -

a necessary measure for the conservation of the purity of faith. This gave the impression that the Christians were contemptuous of the world in which they lived, and of their fellow-men who inhabited the world with them. Christianity became a powerful factor in disrupting family life, when part of the family became converted to the new faith. "Tampering with family relations" was from early times a charge against the Christians. The endeavors of members of the Christian body at proselyting often gave rise to scandal, when girls or women would renounce their former connections for a Christian life. Equally unpopular were the Christians because of their studied restraint from the ordinary occupations and concerns of life. They professed absolute disinterest in politics in a state where the very life of the people was intimately entwined with political matters and the government. They classed themselves as strangers and pilgrims on this earth, as citizens of heaven. They despised earthly rulers and kingdoms for that kingdom which was to come. Their religious services were contrary in essence and detail to those the Romans knew. Their refusal to participate in religious festivals and amusements, their aloofness from their fellow-men marked them as haters of mankind.. Their reluctance to military service in many cases was construed as indication

of a revolutionary spirit. All these considerations, opposed to existing conventions and thought, were in all truth a dangerous power to the state and life of the people, and as such were sufficient ground for persecution. Christianity and heathenism were too widely different essentially to brook any compromise. In the final analysis, toleration on the part of the state was out of the question. The old religion of the gods had become so imbedded in the life of the people that the acceptance of Christianity, even by some, implied and demanded a complete transformation of the old order and a basic upheaval of conditions of life. The whole matter resolved itself into a question of the supremacy of the one force and the utter defeat of the other. The exclusiveness^{of the Christians} is by many considered the chief and motivating cause for the persecutions. Though Rome was ready to receive those religions in toleration which would not be objectionable on moral grounds, and which would not interfere with the worship of the emperor, the exclusive stand of Christianity and its steadfast refusal to grant the emperor the honor of a deity brought the issue to the status of decisive hostility. Christianity would not admit the validity of any other religion and its avowed purpose was to overcome and supersede

all other religious systems. For Christianity a compromise with other faiths, the condition demanded for a peaceful existence under Roman regime, was an impossibility. Their exclusiveness, alluded to in the first part of this paragraph, marked them as people to be feared and suspected.

One of the most pronounced forms in which the Christians displayed their exclusiveness was in their refusal to worship the emperor. The official Roman religion, as far as the state was concerned, was the worship of the genius of the Princeps. This consisted in burning a bit of incense and pouring out a few drops of wine before a picture or bust of the emperor upon an altar provided for the purpose. Any refusal to participate in this ceremony was considered as no less than high treason against the government. In this respect, Christian conviction asserted itself powerfully, and rather than practice idolatry, the Christians chose the punishment which followed the grave charge of treason. In refusing divine honors to the emperor, they defied the state in its very profoundest principles. As an instance of this, Eusebius relates the events just preceding the death of Polycarp. "At length the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp.....and said: 'Swear

by the genius of Caesar. Repent and say, Away with those that deny the gods.' But Polycarp said: 'Away with the impious'. As the governor, however, continued to urge him, and said: 'Swear, and I will dismiss you. Revile Christ'; Polycarp replied, 'Eighty and six years have I served him and he never did me any wrong; and how can I blaspheme my King that has saved me?' (Eus. bk. 4, chap. 15, p. 134).

Pliny's letter to Trajan shows that Trajan was worshipped as a god in his lifetime. Mentioning certain persons who denied under examination that they were Christians, he says: "An information was presented to me.....containing the names of many persons, who, upon examination, denied that they were Christians, or ever had been so; who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and with wine and frankincense made supplication to your image, which I had caused to be brought and set before them, together with the statues of the deities. Moreover, they reviled the name of Christ.....These therefore I thought proper to discharge." This is a clear example of emperor-worship. It was not an unusual practice with the emperors, and just as the principle of Princeps-deification was tenaciously adhered to by the government, so steadfast was the refusal of the Christians to honor any god but Christ. In this refusal to honor the emperor it was made evident that a germ of an entirely new political and social order lay in

Christianity. When the new religion became so strong that it threatened the demolition of the state religion, persecution was the only recourse, and the result was one continual struggle between the forces which must lead to the extirpation of the one or the other. Never in the history of the world was there a sharper conflict than that between Christianity and heathenism.

This exclusiveness gives cause for expression by several writers of this period. Tertullian states that "the Christians were punished because they were Christians". Because of their singularity and aloofness from other people, they had come to be known as "enemies of mankind". Suetonius says: "Christians, a class of men of a new and pernicious superstition, were subjected to severe punishments". (Afflicti supplicis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novae et maleficiae. - Suet. Nero, chap. 16) Tacitus, in speaking of the persecution of Nero, makes the interesting statement of the Christians "all of which were condemned, not so much for the burning of the city, as for their enmity to mankind". (.....haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt. - Tac. Ann. 5, 44) All this guilt and hatred to mankind which is laid to the Christians can, in the final analysis, be nothing more than their neglect of the common worship of the Roman deities, and their exclusiveness, which to the

Roman mind was incomprehensible and unpardonable.

In their religious conceptions, the Christians were so utterly different from the prevailing notions of the heathen in their religious systems, and they were so entirely out of harmony with the government's policy of state-religionism that they really had no place in the world, and no justification for their existence was apparent to the pagan mind. The masses resented the exclusiveness of the followers of Jesus, their tenets seemed to be a reversal of the general order of things social, their principles were revolutionary, and for these reasons the people, as against a common danger, were desirous of seeing severe penalties inflicted upon the Christians.

All other causes previously mentioned must be considered in connection with this exclusiveness of Christianity. In view of previous causes and considerations, then, the profession of Christianity for two hundred years, because of its exclusiveness, was itself a crime. The Name itself in periods of frenzied persecution meant for many the rack, the "troublesome coat", the beasts, and for women horrible indignities often worse than death. All other causes for the persecutions, important as they are, are interwoven and connected in a large degree with this exclusiveness. Without this characteristic, Christianity could not

have been what it was and is. It was exactly this peculiar characteristic of the Christian religion which caused the number of believers to grow, especially under bloody persecutions and adversity. The words were well spoken, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church".

The entire issue considered in the light of Christianity's exclusiveness is well expressed by Healy: "The struggle for supremacy which this incompatibility (and exclusiveness) engendered is without parallel in the history of mankind. On the one side was all the strength and power of a magnificent empire, identified with a system of religion dear to the hearts of its patriotic citizens, and closely interwoven with their history and traditions; on the other was this new creed, destitute of earthly grandeur and possessing neither temples nor history. It is doubtful if any conflict was ever waged in which the contending parties were so unequally equipped, and certainly no struggle was carried on with so much bitterness!"

There were many in the early centuries who were inquisitive as to the merits of Christianity, and who were open to conviction, who weighed impartially the evidences of Christianity and paganism and saw the inestimably greater blessings and worth of Christianity. They forsook the er-

ror of their past worship, even in the face of discouragements, and then recommended the new belief to their fellow men. In this way the progress of Christ's kingdom was steady and progressive under conditions where all other religions would have failed dismally, and the numbers of converts increased constantly.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that the Christians of the first three centuries were not perfect or infallible, nor did they all have the courage of conviction to give their lives rather than to renounce their faith. The accounts of those who fell away are not lacking, but by far the great majority persisted in the faith to the end. While the Christians of the first three centuries were certainly not perfect, and some lapsed into sin and thereby gave offence to their cause, it is equally as unlikely and untrue that there were generally guilty of the gross charges which were laid to them. This much is attested to even by heathen writers. There were among the early believers men of sincere virtue, and outstanding examples of all the things most commendable in human life. The early Christians were quiet and peaceable, not riotous, obedient to the government in all matters pertaining to them, not revolutionary or anarchistic, praying for the Roman emperors and their officials and for

the prosperity of the empire(Tertullian). Justin Martyr said:"Our affair lies not in words, but in works". Pliny has testified(in his letter to Trajan) that the Christians were good and upright, and they were remarkable in patience and fortitude under the sufferings for the principles which they advocated. By all this they glorified God, edified one another, and made converts from among the Gentiles and their former enemies.

Christianity persisted where all other religions failed. Ancient Gentilism could not maintain its stand before the overpowering light of the Gospel. It was an absurd religion, and could not be defended by argument or reason. Christianity was the only true religion, the religion for every man. The Gospel of Jesus embraced all the truth, all that was good in heathen thought and life, and infinitely more, -more than men had ever dreamed before Christ came into the world; it was, in short, the only religion. Christianity was constantly gaining ground, drawing men from the temples and solemnities of pagan worship. The only recourse then was to violence, as we have noted, and in the span of three centuries there were several persecutions, a continual attack against the Gospel, after the last and longest of which Christianity triumphed.

An accomodated Christianity would never have been successful.

So it has been through the ages. The true Church has been persecuted because of its purity and exclusiveness. So it will always be. An absurd religion, no matter what it be, cannot maintain itself without force and violence; but the true religion, Christianity, the only religion which can the question "How can I be saved?", can rely on its own intrinsic purity and excellence, on the guidance and support of Him, for the praise of whose name it has its being, to grow, flourish, and increase, and to answer the question of the ages and guide men to eternal salvation.

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