

The relationship between the roman authorities and the early church

[Life](#), [Relationships](#)



When early Christians began to read the Bible and follow The Way, they begun to walk the path and carved which was uniquely Christian history. Eusebius was a bishop, an overseer in the tradition of the apostle Paul and John among others. It is amazing that his detailed account during those days were not only preserved for posterity, but that he had the tenacity, the determination and the strength to identify and record people and events he was facing during his day. These were people who were being murdered or whose bodies were mutilated.

We read of characters and personalities - different people - from all walks of life who had a common experience. They became disciples of Jesus the Christ and almost all of them faced the same fate which is martyrdom. The Roman government was more than a backdrop for the setting of the story that Eusebius had written. It was an empire whose rule was not to be underestimated for its intelligence and its equally determined goal to subdue all who seemed and were planning to defy that rule. Yet for some observers today, the Rome seemed tolerant for the practice of any religion.

The question then remains: why did Rome persecute the Christians? And why do we look back to this period to call it as the era of the martyrs? Looking back at Rome's policy we see the Imperial authorities as remarkably lenient over the religions of those they have power over with. If the national religions of those territories would include homage to the emperor among their other ceremonies or rites, Rome almost never get in the way. As long as the Roman authorities think that the Christians were just a sect of the Jews, followers of Jesus enjoyed immunity much like the rest of them.

But upon realizing that this supposed Jewish sect were up to more than being very fanatical about their monotheistic beliefs and that this “ sect” not just incessantly talked about Jesus but intended to make Christians out of the entire population of the empire and that this was spreading like wildfire, Rome changed its stance and started to view the Christians as threats. From time to time, the Christians felt the wrath of the Roman authorities as well as its very own people. The experiences of every named disciple or follower were more than horrific.

These Christians suffered torture of every kind invented by fellowhuman being. The main cause of the loathing and revulsion that the early Christians felt from within the Roman society lies in the former’s distinctive life-style. The real Christian is a person who is essentially unlike the rest. Problem is that men always view with suspicion people who are different. Then and now, conformity not distinctiveness, is the way to a trouble-free life. So the more early Christians took their faith seriously the more they were in danger of crowd reaction.

Thus, simply by having a lifestyle in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, the Christian was a constant unspoken condemnation of the pagan way of life. As Eusebius in his time was observing and reacting to the events that took place, it was not that the Christians went about all or any forms of censure to disparage the government and those who were not with “ The Way,” nor were they consciously self-righteous and a cut above all others. It was clear then that the Christian ethic was a criticism of the pagan way of life.

Fundamental to Christianity and primary cause of continual hostilities was the Christian's rejection of the pagan gods. The Romans expectedly had deities for every facet of living- be it for harvest (sowing and reaping), or perhaps something to do with the weather. The Christians denial of them marked the Jesus' followers as enemies of the state. There were also social events which were of themselves reasons that Christians object because they were inherently wrong like the gladiatorial combats which were intolerably inhuman.

The picture is clear that it was hard for Roman society to co-exist with a totally distinct and seemingly opposing lifestyle that to annihilate or hurt to discourage these Christians was the order of the day. This widespread hatred for early Christians helps explain the persecution in the Roman hands. There were outbursts of bloodshed which became common. Another obvious and related reason why Christians were persecuted was the slanders disseminated against them. This was both implied and detailed in the reports made to Eusebius from named persons. Once these defaming stories started they could never be stopped.

The secrecy with which Christian gatherings were held aroused suspicions and bred distrust. Charges include sex orgies, cannibalism and even ridiculously, atheism. But the more serious supposed crime the early disciples of Jesus committed surfaced from the tradition of emperor worship. This practice sprang from the merits of Roman rule; what was popularly called Pax Romana or the Roman peace. The resulting peace was a deep and heartfelt gratitude to the spirit of Rome. This was an easy step from the spirit

of Rome to become the goddess of Roma and eventually evolved into one final symbol of Roman spirit which was the emperor.

Any allegiance other than to that of the Roman emperor slowly spelled intimidation or threat to their governance. No other sect or group posed this threat during these times than the “ fanatical” Christians who were loyal to their “ Lord. ” In one sense, Rome was right because there was a real conflict of loyalties. The Christians never compromised by saying “ Caesar is Lord. ” From then on, Roman authorities branded them as a band of potential revolutionaries threatening the existence of the Roman Empire and were then deserving of expulsion or death.