

Christianity in ancient rome assignment

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The way the Romans viewed Christianity is slightly different from the general theory. The Romans did not spend all their time hunting down Christians in order to crucify them or throw them to the lions. When Christianity first started in the Roman Empire, it was viewed as another sect of Judaism. There was no differentiating between the Jews and the Christians in the eyes of the Roman government. The Christians were seen simply as a more radical group of Jews. They were also not completely trusted because of their monotheistic belief and non-acceptance of the Roman gods.

Not much was even known about them by the Romans because of their mostly secretive ways. This caused many rumors to circulate. Rumors were also started just because they were disliked. During Marcus Aurelius's reign, his good friend Front wrote to him about the Christians, which fueled the rise in arrests and persecution during this time. He set forth accusations in his letter that Christians engaged in heinous practices. Examples he used were initiation rites involving human sacrifice and consumption of infants and religious worship involving ancestral orgies.

But even with these accusations, persecution was still not as widespread as is commonly believed. The prevailing approach to persecuting the Christians continued to be inconsistency. Generally tolerant of all religions, the Romans only persecuted Christians when it was convenient to do so. Basically the Christians were the Roman scapegoat while Roman government was weak and having problems. One example of this is after the massive burning of Rome during Nero's reign. Nero needed to blame somebody for it and because the Christians were a secretive group, he picked them and executed as many as he could.

But according to Ekberg, most Romans did not agree with these actions. Persecution of Christians was more of a political action than an issue of religious conflict. It seems as if the Christians were only martyred because of their refusal to conform to Roman ideas. The Romans did not truly care what the Christians' actual religious practices were. They only cared that the Christians were radical in their opinions and this behavior was viewed as threatening to the stability of the government.

Christianity made people stringently allegiant to something other than Rome. If the Christians believed in the Roman gods as well or just said they did, they would have some connection to Rome and its ruling government. According to Ekberg, the Romans felt the reason for the instability was that the Christians had offended the Romans gods by refusing to accept them as well as their own God. In reality, the government was already unstable, but this attitude went along with the Christians being scapegoats.

Plinck the Younger a Roman governor wrote in a letter to the emperor that he was more apt to punish the Christians for their stubbornness to renounce than for actually practicing the religion (Ekberg 234). In the same letter he says as long as they deny any connection to Christianity and prove it through offerings to Roman gods, he is willing to dismiss the charges brought against them. When Christians were arrested for being Christian, they were asked many times what their religion was. It seems the Romans gave them many chances to deny their religion and keep their lives.

All they had to do was say they were not popular. If people were willing to die or be imprisoned for their beliefs, it made the religion more attractive to

others. It must be something special if its followers were willing to give up their lives in order to cling to it. A good example of a martyr would be Via Perpetuate. She had just converted to Christianity when she was arrested with a group of people. They were sent to prison and the conditions were awful. It was hot, her family worried over her, her father was ready to disown her and she had just had a baby that needed to be cared for.

Through all this she continued to affirm her faith. Even though her diaries state her worry for her child over and over again, and her father's constant badgering to renounce her religion, she would not. Even though she and her friends knew the terrible way which they would be put to death, none of them would renounce. This behavior attracted the admiration of many people who were not Christian, including the warden who guarded them. The reasons she embraced Christianity to the death are not clear. Maybe Christianity was just like the mystery religions that gave people hope.

Or maybe Christians were willing to martyr themselves because Jesus the founder of Christianity and the presumed Son of God had been a martyr himself. This would prove to God and to themselves that they were worthy of the rewards an afterlife would give them. It would show how dedicated they were. What exhibits that persecuting Christians was more politics than real rejection of the religion was the fact that deacons were allowed to visit Perpetuate in jail to console her and pray. If just the practice of Christianity had been illegal, the deacons would not have made it back out of the prison.

Instead it seems that it was mostly the fervor and chaos that the Romans perceived Christianity caused that led them to condemning it. Another event

that shows persecution of Christians was political is the fact it eventually was legalized. Not only was it legalized, but it was made the official religion of Rome. By the time it was legitimate, most Romans had already converted. The government just followed along with what the population was doing in order to make good politics. Everything the Roman government did about Christianity was centered around politics and not beliefs.