

Why the early christians were persecuted



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Most of the time, Christians were tolerated because they were a small group, a minority. They were viewed as anti-social by most of the Roman people. They were also viewed as strange because Romans thought that they actually drank blood and ate the flesh of Jesus. So Romans might of thought that Christians were cannibals. Romans believed in order to live well and win war that they had to sacrifice regularly to the Roman Gods. As this was so important to the Romans in was made state religion and it was their patriotic duty to worship the Roman Gods.

They kept the Gods on their side so that they would be good to them. They made sacrifices of animals and offerings of wine and food. The Romans believed in many Gods: Jupiter, Mars, Juno, Vesta, Lares and Penates. Lares was a household God and was the God of the family's ancestors who protected the entire household. Every house had a shrine, called an lararium, which stood in the atrium. It was like a small cupboard and statues of the Lares were kept in it. Penates were another household Gods who protected the larder or storehouse. It was important to worship them so that the family always had enough to eat.

When the Romans ate the main meal each day the head of the house would pray to Vesta who was the goddess of the flame of the hearth. He would throw some food in the flames as an offering. It was a good sign if the flames crackled. This shows how important the Romans valued worship to the Gods because they preformed many each day. However the Christians did not perform any worship to the household Gods because they believed in only one God and worshipped Him in three persons; the Father, the Son and the

Holy Spirit - this is known as the Trinity. One of the Christians' commandments is " You shall have no God except me. (Exodus 20: 3).

Making sacrifice to any Roman God was distasteful and horrid to any Christian and would break one of the Ten Commandments. As Romans believed that it was necessary to worship the Gods so that they would be in their favour, Romans then considered Christians to be wicked, anti-religious and unpatriotic. Christians did not serve in the army because they might have to kill someone. Another one of Christian commandments was, " You shall not kill. " (Exodus 20: 13) So Christians did not want to break any of the Ten Commandments. Also Christians refused to hold government positions or do anything to help in a corrupt system.

They believed that the one true empire was in heaven. As the Christians did not follow state religion the Roman government decided to persecute them. The Roman magistrates considered themselves to be fair and merciful and gave Christians many opportunities to change their beliefs before being condemned to death in the arena or by formal execution. The Romans could not understand why Christians could not make a simple sacrifice to the Gods. If Christians did make sacrifices they would have all the privileges as a full citizen and would not have to endure a shameful and agonising death.

As Romans did not understand Christian belief they considered them to be anti-social scum. They wanted them killed in the arena for public spectacle by being torn apart by ravenous wild beasts or forced to fight unarmed against trained skilled gladiators. In Chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus talks about persecution that his followers will face and concludes, " You will be

hated by all men on account of my name. " This means that Christians will be persecuted because of Jesus. This is true because the Romans persecuted them because of their 'strange' belief.

The most famous of the Christians persecution was under the reign of one of the most depraved and cruel Roman emperor, Nero. He became the emperor at the age of 17. In AD 59 he had his mother put to death for her criticism of his mistress, Poppaea Sabine. In AD 62 he divorced and later executed Octavia and married Poppaea. Nero had killed members of his family and so he would not be worried about killing a small minority of Christians. In July AD 64 a fire broke out in Rome, which destroyed two-thirds of Rome while Nero was at Antium.

Rumours started that Nero had organised the fire because he wanted to rebuild Rome and considered it squalid and ugly before. These rumours started to spread and could have cost Nero his life and reign. He therefore decided to blame the Christians and had many of them killed. At that time if a person admitted to be a Christian then he or she would be admitting to being an arsonist. They were not just killed by a quick and painless death but a very slow agonising one. For example some were crucified in the arena, which could last about 2 days, others were thrown to wild animals and were made to wear an animal skin on their back.

Others were burned alive as living torches to light Nero's garden at his Golden House. Even after the reign of Nero Christians were still persecuted. This is because the loyalty of Christians to 'Jesus as Lord' was impossible with the worship of the Roman emperor as 'Lord. ' Emperors such as Trajan

and Marcus Aureillus, who were the most deeply committed unity and reform were also the ones who recognised the Christian as a threat to those goals who therefore undertook to eliminate the threat by killing them. Describe how one Modern Christian has been persecuted because of his or her Faith.

Oscar Romero was a Christian who was killed for protesting against injustice. He informed the world about all the people who had been tortured, slaughtered and those who had 'disappeared' in his country, El Salvador. Romero became a bishop in December 1974 and later was appointed Archbishop of El Salvador in 1977. Promptly after becoming the Archbishop, Romero's closest friend Father Rutilio Grande was assassinated by a paramilitary death squad. Father Rutilio Grande was murdered on a road from Aguilares to El Palsnal along with an old man and a young boy.

These murders ignited Romero's growing suspicion of the death squads, which had been the rumoured assassins for the government, and he felt that the United States of America trained them. Romero spoke out against the murders in public masses and in radio broadcasts over YSAX, which he would continue to do during his reign as Archbishop. As he became more the voice against the government he became more the church's spokesman for liberation theology. The political and social conflict that Romero dealt with had been brewing in El Salvador for many years.

The struggle between the classes dates back to 1932, which the peasant uprising (called the matanza) was slaughtered by military. The uprisings are a result of the disproportion of wealth with somewhere between 14 - 200 families controlling the land and economy of El Salvador. The rich people

own the land and employed poor people to work for them. Therefore paying them a very low wage because they could manipulate and exploit them easily. These rich families are aligned with the government and the military while the majority of the country live in poverty.

As the government supported the rich people, because that included them, it made laws to help the rich people stay rich and to ensure that poor people stay poor. The wealthy people had luxurious houses and all the common comforts. Whereas the poor lived in shacks and only had a few possessions. The Government in El Salvador consistently violated human rights. Not only does millions of people suffer from poverty but also oppression by the Government. If any of these poor people tried to rise up against the rich elite of people, then they were tortured and assassinated.

While there have been democratic elections for the presidency of El Salvador many believe that the ballots were tampered with in the elections in 1972 and 1977. Romero sought to become the public voice for the lower class that had not previously had one. He spoke for the people who had no human rights for the oppressed the Roman Catholic Church was their only hope of creating a fairer, peaceful and more just system. Archbishop Romero started to preach about how wrong it was for the rich people to make great profits for owning the land when the workers who work on the land only get a meagre paycheque.

His preaching was encouragement to the poor people who then believed that they should have a better standard of life. All they wanted was a fair wage and wanted a fairer share of the country's wealth. The government was

worried about Romero's teachings and they even asked the Pope to tell Romero to preach about other things. His fight for human rights led to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Those who were enraged and furious by Romero's preaching had only one way left to silence him. On March 24, 1980 at 6: 25 p. m. Romero was performing mass.

He was standing at the altar celebrating the Eucharist when four masked gunmen shot from the back of the church striking him in the chest and killing him instantly. It was for his belief and message that Romero was assassinated by one of the very death squads he spoke out against. Troops outside opened fire murdering women and children. Show how the Example of Jesus might help Christians facing Persecution today Persecution is when others injury people with different points of view or belief to them to stop the movement from spreading. Jesus is portrayed as a man who was brutally treated and faced rejection by his own people.

He blessed when others cursed him. He suffered opposition to his teaching and death for remaining faithful to the ministry given to him by God. The outcome of the life and teaching of Jesus was as miserable on the face of things as that of the early Christian's community and Christians today. The Gospel showed that Jesus conquered evil, sin and death itself by resurrection. He endured persecution. This would help people suffering persecution today because it would give them comfort and strength that what they are going through was also endured by the Son of God.

In chapter 13 Mark wrote for people who were being persecuted and who were suffering. This would give them encouragement because Jesus

describes the persecutions that his followers will face (Mark 13: 5-13) and concludes, " You will be hated by all men on account of my name. " Again this supports the fact that God knew that people would be persecuted for their belief showing that it was not their punishment and would be a relief that other people are going through the same thing as them. Some Christians may feel that on some days it is the end of the world. The trouble of those days will be far worse than any the world has ever known from the very beginning... until the present time. " This would give encouragement for persecuted people not to give up because soon they would be rewarded in heaven. In Jesus' time people expected the Messiah to be a warrior king, a holy man who kept all the laws of the Torah and who would judge sinners. However Jesus was the Messiah who would suffer and die for the people. Jesus eats with sinner and at his death he is still associated with sinner because he was crucified with thieves.

When people asked Jesus 'Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? ' Jesus replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the virtuous but sinners. ' (Mark 2: 13-17) Jesus' mission is to help the poor not the virtuous. Jesus spent his life helping those who were poor. In this way he started the Kingdom of God on earth. The other name for the Kingdom of God was the Messiah's Banquet. Jesus ate with tax collectors and other outcasts.

There was a hidden meaning that Jesus is inviting them to the Messianic Banquet or the Kingdom of God showing that it is open to all people. The Kingdom of God must be received with the simplicity of a child because the Kingdom belongs to the poor and the lowly and those who suffer. As it says

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in Mark's Gospel, " Anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. " (Mark 10: 14-15). In the story of 'The Rich Young Man' Jesus tells a rich man to 'go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven.

But the rich man came away feeling sad because he did not want to give away all his worldly possessions. (Mark 10: 17-22) I think Jesus does not expect the man to give his possessions away but he was testing him if he was willing to do it for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is because if you did good deeds on earth then you would store up treasure in heaven - this reward would be eternal life. In 'The Reward of Renunciation,' Jesus says that whatever his followers have given up for the sake of Him or the Gospels will be repaid 100 times over and will also receive eternal life.

Jesus also said, " Many who are first will be last, and the last first. " (Mark 10: 28-31) This means that people being persecuted will be paid back in heaven. This would give them comfort because they would realise that God is not punishing them. Also in heaven Christians would be treated fairly. One of the great messages of Mark's Gospel is to reassure Christians that the difficulties and trials they were suffering were not unusual. People who had accepted the teaching the values of Jesus could expect persecution because their way of life was a challenge.

In 'The Dangers of Riches' Jesus says, " It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. " (Mark 10: 25) In Jesus' time people thought that God created beautiful things and wanted people to enjoy them. So they thought that God was

pleased with rich people and rewarded them. However this is clearly not true from what Jesus has said. This would give comfort to anyone who is poor that money is not everything. As they suffered on earth they would then receive a lifetime of peace and tranquilly.

I think if you were poor then it might be a test to show how much faith you have in God. For example 'The Parable of the Mustard Seed'. It is about the unlikely result of what seems at first to be an insignificant seed. There was great comfort in Mark's choice of teaching for the early Christian community. The parable contains the promise for Christians, who were struggling that their faithfulness would be rewarded. When Jesus and his disciples went to Gethsemane Jesus said, " Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it. (Mark 14: 36)

This shows that Jesus is scared of the physical pain that he must endure for the people's sake but he accepts his fate and lets God decide. This would give strength to people being persecuted today because the Son of God was afraid of pain so they can be as well and again they would receive eternal life. The story of Gethsemane shows the power of prayer and how one can be close to God by pray. If a person being persecuted today prayed for their pain to be taken away they may think that God is not responding to them, but this is not true - it is God's will.

As Jesus accepted his faith so should Christians today although it may seem that God is not answering them. Also if a Christian has sinned, they must be remorseful and sorry. God will forgive them because when Jesus was taken away to be crucified all his disciples ran away. Jesus shows that he forgives

them when he rose on the third day and told Mary of Magdala to tell his disciples. Liberation theology focuses on the poor and oppressed. Some people think that the richer community has forgotten Jesus' demands about justice and human rights.

There should be a fairer distribution of God's earth and wealth. Jesus example and teaching should be a model for Christians today and give a guide on hoe they should behave. Jesus was a humble man who lived in poverty but did not seek wealth. He mixed with the poor not the rich and Jesus criticised the people who had wealth. In Mark's Gospel Jesus said, " It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. " (Mark 10: 25) Also in 'The Widows Mite' Jesus criticise the rich people for not putting in enough money.

He says, " For they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had had put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on. " (Mark 12: 41-44) The most important event in the Old Testament was when God liberated the Jew from slavery in Egypt. God set them free. So people should follow this example to set people free by freeing them from oppression and giving them an equal share in wealth and in land. God created the world and he created us so everyone has the equal right to have it.