

HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION¹

THE EMPERORS:

Some of these Emperors were very significant, as well as the events that occurred under their reigns:

1. **OCTAVIAN AUGUSTUS CAESAR**. THE DECREE OF REGISTRATION (CENSUS) occurred under him. Octavian was **the first to use the two titles "Augustus Caesar."** *August*-emphasizes the exalted character of his office (not his person). He was to be recognized as the divine on earth. This was not deity, but it was divinity. It was almost a religious role. He was the "August" emperor. He was honored & adored. He was in the place of the gods. He is NOT God, he can bleed and die. But he is acknowledged as having been set over the people of Rome by the gods. It was great for dictatorial power i.e. "*If you want to disobey me, go ahead, but the gods have appointed me, so you may be sorry!*" He was also **IMPERATOR (Emperor in English)**. The word in Latin means "*Chief of staff in the military*" or "*Commander in Chief*" of the armies. This emphasizes that his real power lay in his command of force and his ability to control the *Roman Legions*, which was the essence of imperial rule. He was also **PONTIFEX MAXIMUS**. Every emperor beginning with Octavius (Augustus) included this with his whole long list of titles. It is pre-Christian, pre-church. A civil title. It means the greatest priest. The highest priest. In practice it meant that the Emperor was the honorary high priest of all the religions in the Roman Empire.

OCTAVIAN'S FULL TITLE:

- a) **AUGUSTUS- A TITLE OF HONOR**
- b) **IMPERATOR (Emperor)-A TITLE OF MILITARY AUTHORITY**
- c) **PONTIFEX MAXIMUS-A TITLE OF RELIGIOUS SOVEREIGNTY**
- d) **CAESAR-ORIGINALLY A FAMILY NAME**. It was the name of *Julius Caesar*. The word today has become a synonym for "*ruler*" **CAESAR-Latin; KAISER-German; TSAR/CZAR-Russian**. The word Caesar has become synonymous with emperor, though emperor actually comes from Imperator.
- e) **PRINCEPS (Prin-kepts) - A TITLE MEANING THE FIRST, or PRIMARY CITIZEN OF ROME**. The idea of, "*We're all equal, but I'm more equal than you.*" Kind of like "*Mayor*," which means "*Greater*", from *Mon-yor*, greater than anybody else in town. The symbolic leader of the population. Octavian used this title "*Princeps*" to try and mask his transition from being one of the counsels of the Roman Republic, to the position of unqualified "emperor".

The title of PONTIFEX MAXIMUS. The successors to the Caesars chose that title. The pope is usually called "*Pontiff*" It was originally "*bridge*." Pontifex Maximus was the title of the Roman emperors who were the high priests of heathenism. It's an appropriate synonym for the supreme bishops of Rome, the successors of the Caesars. This historical fact leads us to a principle we should watch for and note: "**ROMANISM [i.e. Roman Catholicism] IS ROME PRESERVED!!**" Watch for what ways this is seen and is a truism. For example, the Church of Rome uses the robes of the Roman patrician class. The colors represented different ranks. The togas, the claims to being the spokesmen of the gods, the claim to sovereignty, etc.

2. **TIBERIUS**. Under whom the public life of Christ is lived. Revel in the beauty of Luke 3. Who the prominent people were is listed, and then it says John in the wilderness was given the truth and preached it. The big shots were overlooked!

3. **CALIGULA**. (Kel-leeg-you-lah). Who was assassinated by the palace guard who felt they were doing the people a service-*and perhaps they were*.

¹ Note: All of this material and information is taken nearly verbatim, including that in parentheses, from lectures given by Dr. Edward Panosian of Bob Jones University in a graduate level course I took in Church History. Words that I've added typically appear in brackets. Also, all bolding, colorizing and italicizing has been added by me. Notes taken c. 1996-97. -Mike Edwards

4. **CLAUDIUS.** He was appointed by the palace guard then wisely ratified by the Senate (*considering what the palace guard had just done to someone they didn't like!*). He grew to be a good ruler & reigned from A.D. 41-54.

Two important edicts are significant to the history of the early Christian church. Interestingly God used this heathen means to protect His people in the infancy of the movement! God uses mankind, sometimes even unsaved mankind! **The edicts:**

A) **A.D. 52 - The Jews are expelled from Rome.** That causes them to settle in other parts of the empire-giving Paul & others more contacts, and instant audiences in synagogues scattered around the empire.

B) **54 A.D. - The Jews were exempted from the otherwise universal requirement of all Roman citizens to present obeisance to the emperor's image.** It was required of all other Roman citizens that they must worship the emperor's image i.e. not the emperor, but the Pontifex Maximus aspect of his office. **They had to bow before, give a sacrifice before, and pour wine in front of a bust of the emperor.** It was a combination of saluting the flag and kneeling and bowing before God. It is not really possible to separate the two (the religious & political components of the Roman Empire). And as long as Christianity was recognized as simply a sect of Judaism, they too were exempt from this demand which they could not perform. This was a Divine protection them for a few years. Later the repelling of the Christians from the Jews denied them further benefit from those exemptions.

5. **NERO A.D. 54-68. This is the emperor under whom Paul was put to death.** He was put to death very shortly before the Senate of Rome sentenced the emperor Nero himself to death! However, Nero was not put to death, since he took his own life (i.e. *"You can't fire me, I resign!"*). It happened very shortly after he went after God's choicest servants. Who was Nero? He did *NOT* fiddle while Rome burned. Fiddles weren't invented yet. They did have lyres. He did not show disinterest in the fact that Rome in A.D. 64 was at least half destroyed by a huge fire that lasted for a week. Half the city of Rome (the homes of 500,000 of the one million people) was destroyed. Actually Nero was greatly concerned for the people. He didn't take delight in it but thought of it as an opportunity to blame someone. He was a psychopath of the first order. By his 25th birthday he had murdered his wife, his mother & his half-brother. (*No little achievement!*). Perhaps you can replace a wife, but killing your mother is really cruel. You can't have another. So it's not unexpected that Nero would turn against others. He was a megalomaniac. He thought he excelled in everything and insisted that his courtiers agree with him. He thought he was a great singer, a great poet, he considered himself an expert in the arts. He almost wrung his hands that he did not have the opportunity to build Rome into a memorial of himself, since it was already built. Some of his courtiers may have *thought* about starting a fire so that he *COULD* rebuild it. **It is interesting that the common men blamed Nero.** It was not beyond belief to think he could be so inhumane as to do so for his own selfish purposes. **So Nero deflected that blame upon the Christians.** He used a group in society that were hated, who were the off scouring, etc. They weren't being punished for being Christians at this point in time, but for being ARSONISTS. This persecution was local, not empire wide.

TYPES OF PERSECUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE:

A) **PERSONAL (i.e. spasmodic, sporadic) PERSECUTIONS OR EVENTS.** e.g. The Neronian persecution **This Neronian persecution was the first political opposition to Christianity.** Because of their teaching, the Christians were either hated or feared. **Persecution was their standing, but NOT THEIR CONTINUOUS CONDITION.**

WHY WERE THE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED AT THIS TIME??

Chronologically...

a) **Because they were allegedly ARSONISTS.** (Which was absurd!)

b) **Because they were allegedly ATHEISTS.** (Which was absurd again! But you see they did NOT believe in the gods of Rome, so they were technically atheists). And interestingly, the best, the most dutiful emperors, were the most consistent in persecuting Christians.

c) **Because they were allegedly TRAITORS.** They were treasonists. [Why?] Because they did not worship the gods of Rome. They felt they had a higher kingdom. The early Christian motto (which if very slightly altered would have made the persecutions unnecessary) was, "**CHRIST IS LORD.**" It is not for nothing that we address the **LORD Jesus Christ.** The Roman motto was: "**CAESAR IS LORD.**" **If they would have substituted one name for the other, they would have had no problem.** "*Caesar Dominus*" vs. "*Christ Dominus.*" [In reality] the Christians were greatly concerned with Rome's survival, though they were accused of not being concerned.

Augustine addressed this several centuries later when Christians were afraid of Rome's impending fall. He wrote a treatise called, "**THE CITY OF GOD.**" **For the first time he presents a Christian philosophy of history.** He uses the imagery of two cities:

- 1) **The City of GOD.** It is single, eternal, a city of peace & holiness, etc.
- 2) **The City of Man.** It is multiple, they come and go, it is a city of war, anger, sin, etc.

What he was saying was this: "***Rome is falling? Let her fall! Many have fallen in the past and others will fall in the future. But your citizenship is in the city of God & it doesn't matter what happens to earthly kingdoms.***" **It's still true.** Whatever the follies, evils, corruptions, of this world, don't panic. That doesn't mean go live in a cave without concern. No, in the midst of darkness we must be salt & light. **But don't get overwrought at all the stupidity & sin. What civilization has not been destroyed by its own excesses?** Don't bail out or stick your head in the sand. Do what is right. Teach others what is right. Vote. Inform people. **Teach the permanent principles so that people can stand, and stand calmly & with composure, & not with a chip on their shoulder nor a tail extended to be stepped on. But a placid, winsome, confident poise of stability in the midst of the frustrations of this age. If we are no different, what will others desire?** i.e. What do we have that they don't? We will not change the world. We will not reverse the direction. But we can be used by God to call "*brands from the burning.*" The Christian practice of saying "*Christus Dominus*", this Lordship of Christ was looked upon the way we would look upon someone who would not pledge allegiance to the national flag or sing the national anthem. **When the emperor is both religious as well as political leader, to not worship to him was reprehensible.** [compare this with what will happen with the coming Antichrist-*mwe*]

d) **The Christians were also charged with IMMORALITY.** Since they met in secret, and only snatches of information were available. What would you conclude about giving "*holy kisses*" calling each other "*brother & sister*" when they met, & "eating" bodies & blood (i.e., *communion*)? After all sexual orgies, prostitution, etc., was widely practiced by the heathen Mystery Religions. That, of course, was totally different. But many believed the rumors anyway!!

e) **The Christians were also charged with EXCLUSIVISM.** (i.e. "*You people think you're right and everyone else is wrong! Where's your tolerance?*") **In a polytheistic society, the Christians stood out for saying Christ was the only way.** Rome was no enemy of religion. They actually felt the more the better. But they felt they should be **added** to the pantheon of gods. In fact the oldest enclosed building still existing is called the **Pantheon.** It is in a spot that is at a portion of the city that descends to a low spot where every direction goes down to it. It's a remarkable descent into antiquity. A perfectly spherical building, it has a dome, & in the center of the dome is an open hole (the only source of light *-and rainfall!*), with holes drilled in the floor that still exist, to allow the rainfall to run away. Niches all around the interior held and displayed the various gods. [Sort of similar to the Rotunda in the U. S. Capital in Washington, D.C. -*mwe*] *Pantheon= many gods.* **There was no primary position, no one god who was dominant, since it was a circle.** Now Rome would have been happy if the Christians would have added an image of Jesus to the Pantheon. **But to say there was no other way, that was a big problem.** The Roman government had absorbed all kinds of nations. And the glue that held it all together was that the emperor was the honorary high priest of all the religions. So none was singled out and none were slighted. But the Christian was not content to *live & let live.*

f) **THE SUPERIOR MORALITY of Christianity was also very convicting to a very immoral society.**

So... since Nero needed a scapegoat, several thousand (NOT hundreds of thousands) were burned alive on the Palatine hill, one of the seven hills on which Rome was built. It was the hill on which the imperial palaces were

built. It overlooks *The Forum* on one side, & the *Circus Maximus* (racetrack) on the other side. That way the emperors could watch everything from their own porches. **The historian Tacitus tells us that Nero illuminated his orgies in the palace gardens at night with human torches. Doused in oil, tied to poles & ignited.** What a combination of sight, stench & sound to provide entertainment for a crazed, pleasure-mad emperor. And thus such revulsion against Nero that the Senate of Rome turned against Nero and ordered his death shortly after he had ordered Paul's death.

The year Nero died (68), almost as an underlining of this evil, from 68-69 the empire was shaken to its imperial foundation. There were 3 emperors in one year, each of whom was violently removed by his successor. **It is as though the God of those who had been killed shook the empire.** Following that was the year **70**, and a new family of emperors comes to power. And the representative was Vespasian.

6. VESPASIAN A.D. 69-79. A member of the Flavian family, Flavius Vespasian. He is mentioned because, while he was only emperor for 10 years (69-79) he had been for the prior 3-4 years commander of the Roman Legions in Palestine, seeking to put down the Jewish revolt, the Jewish war, the war which Josephus the Jewish historian describes in detail. Josephus was a renegade in the eyes of his own people, in the employment of the Romans. He had observed the Jewish revolt from 66-70. **It was a rare exception of a time of two centuries where there was almost universal peace otherwise** (The "*Pax Romana*"). The Romans knew how to rule, how to gain the support of conquered people without having to rule with an iron fist. It was an iron fist but gloved in velvet. They allowed a great deal of self-government, so long as what they did didn't violate imperial laws. Rome knew how to remove the velvet glove though, when necessary. But it is strength to exercise strength moderately. It was a meekness. It was controlled strength.

Now the Jews, in spite of all the exceptional treatment they had received, were so audacious & ungrateful as to revolt against Rome. So Rome removed the velvet glove, and while she could have decimated Jerusalem much sooner than she did, she was patient, she employed "*SIEGE*" warfare. Rome wanted submission. Jerusalem was a prize. It contained the beautiful, rare, rich temple. **Rome envisioned the conquest and the rededication of the temple to the gods of Rome & issued orders that the temple not be destroyed! But Josephus says it was if a higher power than Rome had decreed its destruction.** The years of war continued until Vespasian was recalled to Rome to wear "*The Purple*." And he left his son Titus in command of the Roman legions. The year was A.D. 69. Titus didn't wait long. He was not a youngster. He was trained as a military man. On the 14th day of the month Nisan **he began a siege that would last 134 days.** A siege unique in ancient history. It produced such want, such starvation, such thirst. Rumors of cannibalism were believed. The people inside did not permit anyone to leave. And the soldiers permitted no one to come in. 3&1/2 months! They waited for the city to surrender. No food. The wells dried up, etc. People would be killed who tried to escape out of Jerusalem. The Jews wouldn't allow it, lest it appear they were weak. Philip Schaff says we almost need a "*Homer*" to describe this terrible tragedy. Yet Josephus describes it without a tear.

Josephus describes signs that appeared in heaven and earth that preceded the final destruction. He says the huge temple doors swung open of their own accord, though normally it took the strength of several men to open them. **It was, he says, as though the security of the holy house had dissolved.** One million, 100 thousand had packed the city, since it was Passover. **They expected heaven to open and angels to descend to rescue them. They weren't at all bothered by the threats of the Romans, as they gathered around the temple.** The Christians had evacuated Jerusalem prior to the siege and had removed to the fortress town of Kela. Not one Christian died in the siege, Josephus says. On the 134th day a ramp that had been built to surmount the wall would provide the pathway inside. **The Roman soldiers were instructed not to destroy the temple.** It had gold overlay on wood. Someone threw a firebrand though, and it began to ignite. Screams of terror combined with shouts of victory into a cacophony of sound. The fire began to melt the gold overlay. So the soldiers greedily pulled stone from stone to gather molten gold before it went down between the stones. **So unwittingly these ignorant soldiers fulfilled the Lord Jesus' words that not one stone would be left unturned.** It is also a literal fulfillment of those who prayed "*his blood be on us & our children*", since those two generations experienced the immediate fulfillment, though there is a long-range fulfillment as well. **This is the greatest event of the first century, apart from the crucifixion of Christ.** Titus presided over this destruction of Jerusalem, then was called to Rome upon his father's death in A.D. 79 to succeed him.

7. **TITUS**. He, in turn, was succeeded by his younger brother Domitian.

8. **DOMITIAN**. He nearly completes the first century. John the apostle was probably banished to Patmos during his reign.

9. **NIRVA**. – He was not significant, as he only reigned 2 years.

10. **TRAJAN**. He bridges the two centuries. But most importantly...

...He gives us the **SECOND PHASE IN THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH**. It is the result of a fawning governor in a distant province. The governor was **PLINY**. (Pl-in-e). He writes to tell Trajan what he has been doing to the Christians. He says "I don't seek them out, but when they are sent to me I ask them to do obeisance to you. (Something, it is said, true Christians cannot do.). If they do, I release them. If they don't, I give them two warnings of impending capital punishment, then I kill them." His policy was sort of like, I don't stop people for not wearing seatbelts, but if I stop them for something else, I also cite them for that too. Trajan says little to him in reply. He basically says: "Fine, keep up what you are doing."

B) THAT BRIEF COMMENT BEGINS THE SO-CALLED "PROVINCIAL POLICY" i.e. we leave it to the provinces to do what they wish with the Christians. There will be no imperial policy from Rome at this time... Now let's skip ahead to the 3rd century...

C) EMPIRE-WIDE PERSECUTIONS/THE "IMPERIAL POLICY" (DECIUS) (Des-e-us). 249-251. This was about the time of Origen. He was only on the throne for parts of 3 years. He felt it would be a great way to celebrate the millennial (1000 year) anniversary of the founding of the city of Rome. **For the first time a decree went out throughout the empire that it was a crime to simply BE a Christian.** And how do you prove you are a Christian? By simply refusing to do the patriotic act of worshipping Caesar. You needed to carry your *libeli, libelium*, it was like a license to live. It was possible to purchase from menial officials such a certificate and thus escape, even though both you and he knew you had not done what it said. **To do so though, effectively damned that fraudulent official, since he would think Christians were liars & deceivers.** So most believers would not compromise. Some believers did. Their thinking was, *I can do more good for the Lord alive, than dead.* **But that was wrong! THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS THAN LIFE!** We need to point out to persecutors that **"YOU CAN'T TAKE MY LIFE FROM ME! You can transfer where I live, you can put me in prison, or promote me to heaven. But you can't take my life!"** **If these things are not settled in a man's soul, you won't do right in the moment of crisis.** Don't blow it at the end. And the best way to not blow it at the end, is to not blow it today, then not blow it tomorrow, etc., etc. **This was the first Empire-wide persecution.** In this Decian persecution **tens of thousands of Christians were killed.** The "Imperial Policy" began with Decius in 250 & continued for 63 years, until 313. In that time we have aggressive actions by the Roman government against Christians. They sought to exterminate Christianity from the empire. **The empire had begun to decline, and people were searching for reasons for that decline and remedies to cure it.** [And like today, Christians are being blamed for everything from the Covid pandemic to bigotry, and various "phobia's" i.e. homophobia, transphobia, Islamaphobia, etc. -mwe]

The "PAX ROMANA" (i.e. Roman Peace). The first two centuries of the Roman Empire were centuries of relative peace, and **it came to an end with the death of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180 and began with Augustus Caesar.** From about A.D. 20-180 this peace was broken only by the Jewish War that culminated in 70. This dramatic exception is made all the more so by the unintended destruction of the temple & the loss of perhaps just over 1 million lives according to Josephus.

From 96-180 we had the "five good emperors." Marcus Aurelius was a philosopher/king. He was a STOIC philosopher. Stoicism emphasized duty, obligation, responsibility. The highest good was for every man to do what the gods had set them to do. The highest thing was to do our duty i.e. each person has been made for a purpose. This was not Scripture, but it was quite good. They realized a fundamental truth: Man has an obligation beyond himself. Compare that with "No man liveth unto himself & no man dieth to himself." Robert E. Lee, in writing to his son, once said: "Duty is the noblest word in the English language." Well it's noble in more languages than English! Marcus Aurelius kept a journal/diary called "The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius." In it he wrote for no one's eyes

but his own. He talks to himself and expresses a *pre-Christian* understanding of this concept of duty. At one point he talked about struggling with getting up in the morning, saying he would prefer "*the bedclothes*"...but the gods had placed him there and he had to get up and fulfill his duties. Here was the head of the Roman Empire who nonetheless felt he was under authority too! This was probably the high point of the Roman Empire. After A.D. 180 there is a descent for the next 3 centuries until **Rome finally falls in A.D. 476!** **It was not a sudden, but a slow decline. Other countries, take note!** The first empire-wide persecution came under Decius in 250. The last one bridged the 3rd-4th centuries.

11. DIOCLETIAN - AD 284-305. He bridges those two centuries and does several things that are memorable for the future:

A) **He assumes his office in the Eastern part of the empire.** In a sense he abandons Rome and focuses on the greater strength in the eastern part of the empire. He establishes a *TEMPORARY CAPITAL* in Asia Minor. It is not a permanent capital, but it's significant that it's not Rome. **Very soon Constantine will show up and establish a permanent capital there, in Byzantium (renamed Constantinople).** But Diocletian is the first to focus on the eastern side as more secure and less susceptible to decline than the west. Diocletian drew a line and started two halves, *NOT* two empires, but two administrative divisions. This would prove to be very significant for the future.

B) **He attempted to arrest economic decline by imposing price controls.** He tried to use government to regulate economics, **which has NEVER succeeded.** None have ever ultimately succeeded. He imposed wage & price controls on every commodity and every service. All that does is create black markets &/or bartering (i.e. exchanges of services for services, with no record of a transaction). **The law of supply & demand will triumph, either openly or subtly.**

C) **He attempted to also arrest the confusion that occurred whenever an emperor died.** Every time an emperor died there was a "*free for all*" among the generals to see who would lead the empire next. The generals were the demonstrated leaders by virtue of what they had done and were whom the people looked to for leadership. There was a military aristocracy. The general who could command the widest support of the troops, then became the emperor. **Consequently, there was almost a mini-civil war between the generals and their men to win the position, each time an emperor died. So Diocletian tried to change it to a prior arrangement made before the previous emperor died.** He appointed a "*co-emperor*" to reign in Rome while he (Diocletian) reigned in the east. **So you had a Western Emperor & an Eastern Emperor.** Then they added "*sub-emperors*" so that both east & west had one of those sub (vice) emperors as well. The emperors were called *Augusti's* (Augustus-singular) & the vice presidents called *Caesari* (Caesar-singular.). So it was similar to a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, but actually two of each. The precedent for this came from the old Roman Republic, in which there were two annually elected "*Counsels*" & each was to be a check on the other. They were elected for only 1 year...and you could not succeed yourself immediately, so you had to step out for at least a year before serving again. Diocletian wanted smooth transitions when governing officials changed. Diocletian didn't want to wait until he died to find out how it worked, since he wouldn't see it then. **So shockingly, he ABDICATED! He resigned, so that he could sit back and watch how it worked out. THAT IS RARE!** You will not need all the fingers on one hand to list all the significant abdications in history. From presidencies, to monarchies, to dictatorships, etc. It is very rare **...And it didn't work!!! There was a free-for-all. All three remaining officeholders fought over it in a civil war that lasted 9 years & from which, Constantine emerged victorious.**

D) **The final reason to remember Diocletian is for his last & greatest persecution of the Christian church.** He was the last emperor to take overt action against the Church. **His was the last & GREATEST effort to exterminate the Christians.** And that, like everything else he did, failed! **It was energetic, deliberate & very carefully focused along 3 lines, in a series of edicts after A.D. 300 & before he abdicated in 305.** In chronological succession he issued an:

1) **Edict against LITERATURE.** He sought to destroy all the books, Bibles, etc. The assumption was that without their books & writings the Christians would not be able to propagate their religion. **But many had hidden God's Word in their hearts.**

- 2) **Edict against the LEADERSHIP** of the Christian church. This too was provoked by his knowledge of heathen religions. **Heathen religions required priests, and without priests they couldn't survive. But he knew nothing of "the priesthood of all believers."**
- 3) **Edict against the LAITY**. "*All the efforts of beasts & bestial men were focused to the useless end of exterminating Christianity*"-Schaff.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ROMAN PERSECUTION OF THE FIRST 3 CENTURIES:

Panosian wisely notes: *The people of God always endure persecution better than they endure prosperity.
The people of God always have more trouble with prosperity than with difficulty.*

1) **THE PURIFICATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE**. There were almost no false professors, hypocrites, etc., since confessing Christ had lethal consequences. Capital punishment may temporarily reduce the number of believers, but it will increase their strength.

2) **THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY**. The martyrs were witnesses to the grace of God, to the Lord's enabling of His people to endure what no human effort can endure. **It was obvious that there was an *other-worldly* grace given.** All false courage evaporates when beasts are loosed, when the fires are lit, etc. **This was the height of civilization & yet also the height of evil** [cf. **today in America -mwe**]. e.g. roasting a person on a grid until their bodily liquids literally boiled! "*Quartering*" people i.e. Four horses, tied to a person's four limbs and at a signal forced off in 4 different directions. Crucifixion-the Persians developed it. It was designed to prolong death. It was not death by inflicting a wound, but by asphyxiation. The east has been more ingenious than the west in torture (bamboo shoots under fingernails, etc.). **Whoever says man is fundamentally good is ignorant of history at least!**

3) **GROWTH (PROPOGATION) OF THE FAITH**. "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of church.*" Ex. 1:12 expresses it well: "*The more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied & grew.*" **There was admiration and wonder on the part of the heathen, at the strength of the Christians.**

4) **The development of an INCIPIENT ORGANIZATION**. i.e. someone has to speak on behalf of the church.

5) **The recognition of the N.T. CANON OF SCRIPTURE**. Note: **Not its creation, but a recognition**. If Diocletian says all the holy books are to be destroyed, then what has been circulating among the believers must be distinguished. It was Scripture when it was written, but it took 3-4 centuries for it to be officially recognized. **The 27 book canon is first formerly pronounced in the 390's in the Synod of Carthage, though it was basically recognized and delineated by A.D. 175-180. It does not mean that the church gave us the Bible. God gave it!**

6) **The DEFINING OF A CREED**. *Credo* is from Latin and means "*I believe.*" Simple creeds were for teaching purposes, more elaborate creeds were for theological purposes, & even more elaborate creeds were to aid in the recognition of heresies. There are public confessional creeds that are not elaborate, but simple. Others go into great detail regarding error. We see in them the effects of the Church Councils from the 4th-7th centuries.

12. **CONSTANTINE**. He marks the *fourth stage* in the reaction of the Roman world to Christianity (The other stages were (1) **Religious rejection**; (2) **Popular acceptance**; (3) **Political persecution**, and now (4) **Official acceptance** (political acceptance). **There were TWO STAGES to this:**

A) **TOLERATION**. This is first associated with the emperor Constantine, who is victorious in the civil war after Diocletian abdicated. He came to power in 311-312, dying about 336. **In 313 the Edict of Milan** (northern Italy) was proclaimed by him and his co-emperor (who was his inferior, nonetheless). **In the battle of the Mulvian**

bridge he presumed to see in the sky a cross & heard a voice "*in this sign go forth & conquer.*" It was shaped like a sword, with the handle facing you. **The Chi & Rho of the Greek, the first two letters of Christos.** "*In Hoc Signo, Vince*" (In-hock-signo-winkay) i.e. "*In this sign go forth & conquer.*" *Who knows what he saw?!* But he claimed to have seen it, and he vowed a vow that if he won, he and his armies would become Christian. We really don't know about the truth of all of this. It's described by his biographer, the "**Father of Church History**", **EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA.** (You-see-be-us). He writes about this more than 2 decades after the event. Eusebius was granted interviews with the emperor, and undoubtedly it was embellished by the emperor. Maybe Constantine thought "*if we can't lick em, join em.*" No one can really answer these questions. At any rate, Constantine became a "*Christian.*" We don't know what that meant either. Was he truly converted or just a Christian in name? One fact we do know, He waited to be baptized until close to his death. Did he think that would wash away the majority of his sins? **Constantine ended the persecution of Christians.** He allowed Christianity legal equality with all the other religions. **He was still PONTIFEX MAXIMUS.** **He, in effect,** (though not literally) **elevated Christ to the Pantheon. But by his claiming to be a follower of Christ, he actually elevated Christ above the other gods.** Constantine also began the process of councils for the identification of heresy.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONSTANTINE'S TOLERATION:

- 1) **GROWTH, MASSIVE GROWTH.** Christianity's numbers increased exponentially! *But many were Christian in name only!*
- 2) **IMPERIAL FAVOR.** You can't replace all the lives that were put to death by past emperors, **but what Constantine does do is use the Roman treasury to build buildings (churches) as compensation. The first church buildings are built in the fourth century.** Often houses of worship were built right on top of the foundations of heathen temples. It was not just syncretism but regarded as the triumph of Christianity over heathenism. Many medieval churches are even built over Roman temples, with those temples as their foundation. That's not to suggest that they were heathen temples (though they usually are now!). When built it was to show the triumph of Christianity over the false religions.
- 3) **THE ABSENCE OF RISK.** Now there was much more potential for temporal gain rather than loss, in being a Christian.
- 4) **A MIXED MULTITUDE IN THE CHURCH.** **This will be a huge problem, as well as an unbiblical one** (2 Cor. 6:14-ff)
- 5) **A DOUBLE STANDARD OF PIETY.** What is a true Christian? There was a great desire by the true believers to separate from the hypocrites and "hangers on", which gives rise to the next consequence:
- 6) **MONASTICISM.** Some professing believers withdrew from society and separated themselves. Since the world would no longer martyr them, they decided to engage in a kind of self-imposed martyrdom! It was often grotesque, as well as wrong.
- 7) **THE EMERGENCE OF DISSENTING GROUPS.**...who challenge the impurity of the mixed multitude. They wish to come out of them. Not in a monastic sense, but in a collegiate sense, a separate sense from the mixed multitude.
- 8) **LOSS OF TESTIMONY WITH THE WORLD.** The unsaved saw fakes and said, "*I don't want to be part of that hypocritical faith.*"
- 9) **GREATER ORGANIZATIONAL COMPLEXITY & PERSONNEL.** The larger this grows the more personnel are needed, and so they begin to look for effective administrators more than godly pastors. And now there is more authority & power & influence associated with becoming a clergyman. And now there is more potential for material gain in ecclesiastical service. This will eventually lead to a huge organizational structure (e.g. popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, etc.), as well as clerical corruption & evil. People seeking ecclesiastical office for the wrong reasons: for pride, prosperity, wealth, influence, simony

becoming rampant, etc. **How great are the consequences of this official toleration!**

13. THEODOSIUS. Under him Christianity receives an **OFFICIAL EMBRACE in an imposing sense.** Under **Theodosius** (who was the last significant emperor of the 4th century) the second stage takes place:

B) STATE ENDORSEMENT/SPONSORSHIP. *Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.* He's emperor for the last 2 decades of the fourth century, reigning in Constantinople. In the 380's he makes Christianity the *only* religion allowed. All the others are now excluded, denounced, and prohibited, like Christianity had been for the first 3 centuries. It was an exclusive, official embrace. Now birth in a community equaled church membership. This would be the prelude to the medieval "*confusion*"(i.e. "*melt together*") of Church & State!