

THE PAGAN ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE FIRST CENTURY

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The coincidence of the establishment of the Roman Empire with the rise of Christianity has often claimed the attention of historians. The question of the relation of the development of these institutions will always, perhaps, be much discussed. At least it is interesting to try to trace the interactions of the two, especially as these bear upon the growth of Christianity. What I propose doing in the scope of this paper is to ascertain the pagan attitude toward Christianity in the first century A.D. The emphasis will naturally fall upon the attitude expressed within the Empire.

As the subject itself indicates, the sources for this study will be the writings that emanated from the period and, having been preserved in one form or other, are extant today. Since a large part of the paper will be a critical evaluation and discussion of each of the contributions, to ascertain particular aspects of the pagan attitude reflected by or in them, we shall reserve more specific evaluation to the body of the paper itself. However, a few general remarks are in order at this point.

The most direct sources for our subject lie in the pagan writings themselves, in such cases where the authors either directly or otherwise allude to Christianity. Viewing these references for the first time one is immediately struck with two things--- their paucity and brevity. The latter is the more easily explained. The Romans of this period were already quite aware of Judaism. As a matter of fact, it was a commonplace. The Jews were widely scattered. In 37 A.D. We read of Jews of at least sixteen nations coming to the annual Pentecost at Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> At first Christians were regarded as just another Jewish sect and even after their peculiarity was recognized Judaism and Christianity were at times classed together. Thus to the Roman mind Christianity was not some startling innovation that would call for extended literary reference. This may also partially account for the striking paucity of pagan references to Christianity, but this question deserves further notice.

The general silence of the Roman satirists is significant. However, this cannot be urged to show the obscurity of the church at the time of the Neronian persecution. In the next generation the situation is not much better. Juvenal and Martial relegate the Christians to the distant background of their picture. The evidence from the correspondence of Pliny and Trajan prevents us from assuming that this lack is due to the comparative insignificance of the Christian community. These narratives lead us to believe that at the time Christians were at least as important and influential as the Jews in the area of Bithynia.<sup>2</sup> The silence must be otherwise accounted for. One reason for this may lie in the fact that Christians offered poor material for satire. So far as they presented any salient features which the satirist might turn to ridicule, these were found in the Jews to a still greater degree. Where they differed, their distinctive characteristics would seem quite negative to the superficial glance of the Roman.<sup>3</sup> Even Lucian, who satirizes everything, and living at a time when Christians abounded, can say no more than that they were good-natured, charitable people, not overwise, and easily duped by Charlatans.<sup>4</sup>

We may adduce another reason for the general silence that is similar to the former. The uniqueness of the Christians lay neither in nationality, customs, nor manners, but in their religion.<sup>5</sup> And perhaps it was the religious indifference of these men that produced the lack of literary reference. This fact has been demonstrated with respect to the poetry of Claudian, being pointed out by Milman, and serves to illustrate the point.

Here is a poet writing at the actual crisis  
of the complete triumph of the new religion  
and the visible extinction of the old: if  
we may so speak, a strictly historical poet  
...yet...no one would know the existence of  
Christianity at that period of the world by  
reading the works of Claudian.<sup>6</sup>

The reticence of the philosophers is also noteworthy.<sup>7</sup> It seems logical that they might have noticed Christianity at least as a moral phenomenon. However, regarding Seneca, most of his works were written before the Christians had attracted public notice on any large scale, so this explains his complete lack of reference. The same might be said of Philo. But the situation is worse when the enquiry is pushed further. Why, in all the works of Plutarch is there not one allusion to the Christians? Why again is there but one brief scornful allusion in Marcus Aurelius, although he had literally been flooded with apologies and memorials on behalf of the Christians, and though they served in large numbers in the very army which he commanded in person?<sup>8</sup> One answer may lie in the desire of such men not to add to the Christians' notoriety by public reference to them and thus by a sort of contemptuous reticence try to stem the developing religious movement, which was working its way upwards from the lower levels of society, and which they viewed with alarm and misgiving.<sup>9</sup> Augustine indicates what might be another solution.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps on the one hand they dared not praise the Christians because of the attitude and measures their government was taking towards them, and on the other hand, did not find fault with them because of their own possible affinity or sympathy with the philosophy. (Augustine is here specifically referring to Seneca.)

All things considered, however, we still have enough pagan references to Christianity to enable us to formulate rather concise concepts of their attitude. The first indications of this attitude are found in the book of Acts in relation to the trials of Paul and his contact with Roman officials. These are brief and often indirect expressions but can give us a reliable idea of the type of tolerance in effect at the time. For a compendium of all the pagan references to Christianity, the reader is asked to turn to chapter IV of this paper.

When we turn to the next most direct line of source material, the Christian writers of the period, we find an entirely different situation. Here there was originally an abundance of material, especially in the Apologists. Unfortunately, many works have

been lost, and only titles remain, as well as many brief extracts and remarks in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. One has to deal carefully with this body of evidence, for it must be kept in mind that the pagan attitude toward Christianity is only indirectly expressed in these writers, with the exception of Origen and possibly Minucius Felix. Often an Apology is written as an answer to certain pagan charges against the Christians and it is only rarely that the charges come down to us in anything that approaches their original literary caste. Origen and Minucius Felix are good exceptions.

Although the earliest writings of the Fathers are from the Apostolic period, there are no indications of the pagan attitude in them that I know of until we come to the turn of the first century.<sup>11</sup> Considering the Christian writers generally, perhaps our most useful single source is Eusebius. Living between about 260 and 340, he was a confidential friend and advisor of Constantine. Among his other historical works, his *Ecclesiastical History* stands out foremost. This work covers the period from the incarnation to the defeat and death of Licinius in 324. The work went through a number of revisions and in its present form was finished in 324 or a little later.<sup>12</sup> The value of this work is generally acknowledged, for Eusebius in the main is quite trustworthy in so far as faithful application of good methods is concerned. He is constantly citing and evaluating his sources. For our purposes this work serves as an invaluable collection of information not attainable in any other ancient author.

Our last main body of evidence is archaeological. The rather recent work done in the catacombs has brought to light many things that will be discussed. In this field the use of names plays an important role. But inscriptions of this kind should have other additional evidence before their word can be accepted as final.

The imperial attitude toward Christianity before A.D. 64 found expression in the problem of Jesus himself. Christ was born under the first Roman emperor and crucified under the second. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) is reported to have been frightened by the account of Pilate, procurator of Judaea, of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and to have unsuccessfully proposed to the senate the enrollment of Christ among the Roman gods. But this rests only on the questionably authority of Tertullian (c. 160-223, Montanist Presbyter of Carthage).<sup>1</sup> However, it does seem probable that Pilate reported the incident to Tiberius, for provincial reports were regular custom, and such a noteworthy event, seen as Pilate must have seen it, in the light of the ensuing consequences, would probably have found its way into his correspondence.<sup>2</sup> The intervention of Pilate's wife, Claudia Procla, on behalf of Jesus in all probability came to the emperor's knowledge also, because of her connection with the royal house; or at least it would have made more likely the report of the whole affair going to Tiberius.<sup>3</sup>

The edict of Claudius (41-54) in A.D. 53, which banished the Jews from Rome, fell also upon the Christians, but as Jews, with whom they were yet confounded. Suetonius tells us that, "For constant riots instigated by Chrestus he (Claudius) expelled the Jews from Rome."<sup>4</sup> Lightfoot argues that Suetonius makes a double mistake here.<sup>5</sup> He first confuses the names Chrestus and Christus. But this confusion was not unnatural, for the difference in pronunciation was hardly perceptible and Chrestus, "the good-natured," was frequently used as a proper name, while Christus, "the anointed one," would convey no idea at all to one such as Suetonius who was probably ignorant of the Old Testament and unacquainted with Hebrew customs. In other words, Suetonius meant to use the proper noun Christus. In the second place, it seems probable that the disturbances which Suetonius here attributes to the instigation of one Chrestus were really caused by the various conflicting rumors of claimants to the Messianism. (The Hebrew word Messiah means the same as the Greek "Christus," "anointed one.") The implication in this case would be that Claudius feared an uprising of Jews headed by their Messiah. Nevertheless, even in this case, we may suppose that the Christ of Nazareth held a prominent place in these reports, for he must have been not less known at this time than any of the false Christs.<sup>6</sup>

So the Roman government is not yet aware of the distinctiveness of Christianity. I think it can be safely said that the writers of Greece and Rome were ignorant even of the existence of Jesus, until, several years after his crucifixion, the effects of his mission, in the steady growth of the sect of his followers, forced from them some contemptuous notice, and then roused them to opposition.<sup>7</sup>

The attitude of the imperial government and its officials toward the Christians before Nero's persecution is known to us mainly from the Scriptures. They were simply

looked upon and treated as Jews.<sup>8</sup> There is, however, on reference in Tacitus that has been taken to refer to Christianity. In his *Annals* at the year 57 A.D., speaking of the restoration of rank to one Lucius Varus, he adds that one Pomponia Graecina, a lady of distinction, who had been charged with embracing a foreign superstition (“superstionis externae”), was declared innocent by her husband and a council of relatives upon his return from Britain.<sup>9</sup> Although the description of Graecina which follows in the passage is consistent with what would be expected of a Christian, we would not be positive that the allusion “foreign superstition” refers to Christianity from this reference. Fortunately, the Christianity of Pomponia Graecina has been confirmed by the discovery of the gravestone of a Pomponius Graecinus and other members of the same family in a very ancient crypt of Lucina, near the catacomb of St. Callistus.<sup>10</sup>

Evidently Tacitus is actually representing the wording of the charge that was placed against the woman, that in the year 57 Christianity was regarded as a foreign superstition by the Romans, who probably classed it with Judaism. This attitude is consonant with the treatment Paul received up to the point of his release from captivity in 63, which we shall find occasion later to discuss at length. Adherence to the sect was not considered criminal, rather, it was even accorded the common rights of protection. Thus, with Judaism, Christianity was classed as a “religio licita.”

We shall now digress to include two references to Christianity from sources other than Roman for the sake of interest and completeness. The first known pagan reference to Christ is that found in the Syriac letter of Mara, a philosopher, the son of Serapion, written to his son as an admonition in A.D. 74. He refers to the “Wise King” of the Jews who was murdered “because of the new laws which he enacted,” and compares him with Socrates and Pythagoras – victims of the caprice of men and martyrs for the cause of wisdom.<sup>11</sup> The nationality and position of Mara are unknown, although it seems safe to class him as lying outside the pale of the Christian communion or sympathy.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the works which most probably discuss this relatively recent find (Ewald in 1855 wrote of it as “recently discovered”) were not available to me.<sup>13</sup> Ewald, the great German Hebraist, and Schaff both place it in the year A.D. 74 without any comment.<sup>14</sup> From what B.P. Pratten says, it appears that the original manuscript is extant and is kept in the British Museum.<sup>15</sup> It is significant that Ewald in the same passage describes this reference of Mara as “very noteworthy on account not only of its early date, but also of its ingenuous simplicity and its elevated characteristics.” He also refers to it as the first known pagan reference to Christ.

The second author we would like to mention in this connection is Flavius Josephus, the great Jewish historian. He was noteworthy as a Roman sympathizer, and should be mentioned. He published his *Jewish Antiquities* in A.D. 94, in the thirteenth year of Domitian, when he was fifty-six years of age. In all our manuscripts of this work there appear two passages that have received much attention. The first<sup>16</sup> tells of Jesus and his followers, and the second of the arraignment and stoning of James, the brother of Jesus, “the one called Christ (‘tou legomenou Christou’).”<sup>17</sup> The latter passage is

generally regarded as authentic, unless the last three words be taken as an interpolation. Most scholars, however, doubt either the authenticity or the integrity of the former. I think Ewald has the best answer to the problem.<sup>18</sup> He believes that Josephus' original reference to Jesus was later altered by a Christian, and that it has come down to us in the form in which we see it in all manuscripts because these were preserved mainly through Christians. He says the work came to be possessed largely by Christians, and early became to them a chief source for historical knowledge generally. The passage was then altered so as to make an edition that would be more interesting to Christians. He gives a reconstruction of the passage in the Greek based upon judicious omissions that agrees generally with that of Schaff. It is as follows:

Now there was about this time Jesus...  
He drew over to him both many of the  
Jews and many of the Gentiles... And  
when Pilate, at the suggestion of the  
principal men among us, had condemned  
him to the cross, those that loved him  
at the first did not forsake him... And  
the tribe of Christians, so named from  
him, are not extinct at this day.<sup>19</sup>

we have said that up to the persecution of Nero Christianity was considered and tolerated as a "religio licita." There are further indications of this when we look at Paul's contact with the Roman government. The nest scholars are still divided as to whether or not Paul was acquitted after his first trial at Rome in A.D. 63, but nearly all English biographers and commentators defend the second Roman captivity.<sup>20</sup> And we hold to this view. Now since Paul was probably acquitted, the issue of the trial was a formal decision by the supreme court of the Empire that it was permissible to preach Christianity. Although reversed by a later decision, the trial was actually a charter of religious liberty.<sup>21</sup> Other references point in the same direction. The general indolence of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, in relation to Paul's arrangement by the Jews; the befriending attitude of Claudius Lysias, the military tribune ("chiliarchos") toward Paul in Jerusalem; and the pure indifference of Porcius Festus, successor of Felix as governor in Caesarea, add up to the same thing – a fair tolerance.<sup>22</sup>

But with Paul's second Roman captivity and the persecution of Nero, it is plain that some great change has passed over the relations between the church and the Empire. Roman justice or indifference has been exchanged for Roman oppression.

Before we discuss the Neronian policy toward Christianity, it would be helpful to note the extent of Christianity in the Empire in the first century before the time of Trajan. At this point Harnack's work is indispensable. There is positive evidence for Christians or Christian communities in such places as Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Syria, northern

Pontus, as well as the whole of Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Thrace, Dalmatia, Italy, Crete, Cyprus, and possibly Spain. It is significant that by 180 there were Christians in all the Roman provinces, and in fact beyond the limits of the Empire. “And already the majority of these Christians comprised a great federation, which assumed a consolidated shape and polity about the year 180.”<sup>23</sup>

## II

For our information on Nero's attitude toward Christians from strictly pagan sources we are dependant upon the celebrated passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus and the reference of Suetonius. But the nature of this evidence is different than, say, the report of Pliny. Tacitus (c. A.D. 54-118) comes from a noble and wealthy stock and his prejudices, mode of thought, and tastes all reflect those of the highest and most exclusive society. Reaching the culmination of his political career in the late nineties when he was made consul, he retired and began his series on Roman History. His *Annals* in sixteen books treat of the history of the Empire down to the end of the Claudian dynasty. His representation is generally believed to be quite trustworthy, some ranking him at the head of Roman historians.<sup>24</sup> But although his facts may generally be trusted, it should be kept in mind that his work was written for publication, and the question often arises while reading him how much is to be attributed to rhetoric or to his anti-imperial bias. Also, it was written over fifty years after Nero, in about 115-117, and leaves him with a more developed point of view.<sup>25</sup> Let us then refer to these authorities to see first Nero's action against the Christians and then from this to come to his attitude and policy, and finally, to consider the popular attitude of the day toward the Christians.

Upon describing the various methods of expiation that were used after the devastating fire that swept most of Rome in A.D. 64, Tacitus adds that nothing availed to relieve Nero of the infamy of being believed to have ordered the fire. Hence he charged the guilt to "the persons commonly called Christians who were hated for their enormities ('flagitia')." He then gives an account of the origin and spread of the religion, describes the tortures that were imposed on the Christians, and adds how a feeling of pity ("miseratio") arose toward them because they seemed mere victims of the ferocity of one man, though they were guilty and deserving of the most severe punishment.<sup>26</sup>

This passage is not without its difficulties and bears further analysis. That some historians have said that it was not Christians at all, but the Jews, who suffered need not concern us.<sup>27</sup> In the first place, we should note that some basic facts of the history of the founding of Christianity are attested: that Christ was its founder and was put to death under Pilate; that Judaea was the original home of the sect; and that as a result of Jesus' death it was checked for a moment, but broke out again not only through Judaea, but also through Rome. Besides details of the persecution, we have statements that refer to the attitude of the populace. Tacitus says the objects of the persecution were vulgarly called Christians ("vulgus Christinaos appellabat"). This seems to mean that the Christians were given this appellation by the common crowd, and attaches to the term "Christian" a meaning of opprobrium. I think Tacitus here actually refers to the practice of the time of Nero and not his own, and probably got such information from his sources. The statement does not seem to be one which he would invent. We are also told that these Christians were hated for their shameful acts ("per flagitia invidios"). The word "invideo" implies the

Christians were looked upon with spite or malice, which is a little clearer than “hated.” We shall later note the implications of the term “flagitia”.

The question arises as to what evidence Tacitus used to make this inference of the popular attitude, if any. Can we charge him with a reconstruction of popular attitude based upon conditions in his own day? In this case I think not. The internal evidence in the passage itself seems to substantiate this. For upon Nero’s first seizure of the Christians the Roman populace accepted the deed as justifiable. It was only after the persecution had progressed and turned into a series of flagrant enormities that the popular sentiment turned to a detached pity that the Christians were sacrificed not on the altar of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man. The Roman people, then, actually had thought that the death of the Christians was for the public good, not because they were guilty of incendiarism, as might be inferred, but hatred of the human race.

What *does* appear to be evidently the infusion of Tacitus’ own sentiments appears elsewhere in the passage. In telling of its early beginnings, he calls Christianity the “pernicious superstition (‘exitiabilis’);” “that pest” (‘malum’); and later classes it with all that is outrageous and shameful (“atrocia atque pudenda”). Keeping this in mind, I think it can be said that Tacitus has given us in the main the popular attitude of the time toward the Christians. Where he got such information is more difficult to say. The trend of popular attitude toward Christians must certainly have been common historical knowledge to a man of his position. I think there would have been sources of such a nature at his disposal that would give him indications of such facts. It is not inconceivable that there were persons living in 115 who had witnessed the fire of 64 as adults some fifty years previous.

The evidence of Suetonius adds considerably to our knowledge of Nero’s policy toward the Christians. He lived from about A.D. 75-160 and was an encyclopedic and colorful writer. His *Lives of the Emperors* in eight books treats of twelve Caesars from Julius to Domitian. During a discussion of Nero’s innovations, improvements, and regulations, Suetonius says, “The Christians, a race of men addicted to a new and pestilent superstition (‘superstitionis novae ac maleficae’) were severely dealt with.”<sup>28</sup> Every other regulation mentioned in the list is the permanent institution of a custom, or the lasting suppression of an abuse. And it seems inconsistent to introduce among these a statement which meant only that a number of Christians were executed on the charge of causing a fire. The interpretation seems rather that Suetonius considered Nero to have maintained a steady prosecution implies a permanent settled policy.<sup>29</sup> We shall later see that this interpretation is consonant with the evidence derived from Pliny.

It would appear that this interpretation runs counter to the account of Tacitus. In reality, his is a slightly different and more detailed version of the same facts. Suetonius merely gives a brief statement of the permanent administrative principle into which Nero’s policy ultimately resolved itself. Tacitus, however, prefixes to his account of the same result a description of the origin and gradual development of Nero’s policy; and the

picture is so vividly drawn as to withdraw the mind of the reader from the later stages of the persecution and the results of Nero's action.<sup>30</sup>

Clement of Rome gives what is in all probability another reference to the Neronian persecution, though, of course, from a Christian viewpoint.<sup>31</sup> His letter to the church at Corinth on the occasion of the trouble among the Christians there has been considered genuine and as coming from his own hand by all ancient writers from Dionysius of Corinth<sup>32</sup> (bishop c. A.D. 170) down.<sup>33</sup> It even passed into some early New Testaments like Codex Alexandrinus, of the fifth century, and into a Syriac manuscript of the New Testament written in the twelfth century. Goodspeed dates the letter at A.D. 95, as most others.<sup>34</sup> In this entire first section of the letter Clement points out the evil fruits of jealousy. Having referred to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (which from the nature of the context, he places in Rome), describing them as heroes nearest ourselves ("tous hengista athletes"), he adds:

Besides these men who lived such holy lives, there was a great multitude ('magna multitudo') of the elect who suffered many outrages ('contumelias') because of jealousy and became a shining example among us ('inter nos exstiterunt'). It was because of jealousy ('aemulationem') that women were paraded as Danaids and Dircae<sup>35</sup> and put to death after they had suffered horrible and cruel indignities ('grava et nefanda supplicia sustinuissent'). They kept up the race of faith to the finish and, despite their physical weakness, won the prize they deserved.<sup>36</sup>

Coming from within the first century, from a learned man in Rome, who, of course, was not following any pagan historians that we know of, and who was in a position to view the Neronian persecution from a good temporal vantage point, this reference is of value.

We should first of all note how the phrase of Clement "polu plethos" ("magna multitudo" in the Latin MSS) agrees closely with Tacitus' "multitudo ingens" in giving a quantitative judgment on the number of Christians involved in the Neronian persecutions. That there were hundreds of Christians involved seems to me entirely likely. In this passage is an interesting preference to the Christian concept of the ultimate cause of not only the particularly persecution in question, but all the calamitous times the church had been having. The whole first part of the letter gives instances where jealousy and envy within the church brought about troubles, persecution, and martyrdoms. At this point I

think Clement strains many instances so he can use them to illustrate his argument. At any rate, he warns Corinth that the precarious times in which they are living may indeed change for the worse and bring similar judgment. Perhaps there is not a little admiration due such men who, true to their Gospel, did not revolt, or speak against the government, but remaining subject to the higher powers, examined themselves first of all to see if perchance the blame for suffering was really theirs.<sup>37</sup>

Other ancient references to the Neronian persecutions of the Christians come considerably later than these three Tacitus, Suetonius, and Clement, and add nothing to our knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

That the persecution of Nero spread to Spain, as would be indicated by the inscription from Lusitania<sup>39</sup> is very uncertain. The inscription is not listed in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*,<sup>40</sup> and Harnack and Haines class it as one of a body of spurious inscriptions from Spain.<sup>41</sup> The references of later Christians cannot be used as evidence<sup>42</sup> and the passage in the Apocalypse can only be used when its date is settled. If the Apocalypse was written between 68-70 (many scholars prefer this to the later date of 95) we know of one martyr in the provinces during the Neronian persecution – Antipas of Pergamum.<sup>43</sup> I do not think it too likely that there was any persecution outside of Rome under Nero.

The question now arises as to what the cause was that lay behind Nero's attitude. We will dwell at some length on this problem because the principles implicit in the Roman attitude here serve as the basis for all subsequent suppressive police. The facts reported in Tacitus lead me to believe that in substituting the Christians for himself as the guilty party connected with the conflagration, Nero's attitude toward them was consonant with public sentiment. Let us then see how the available evidence points to this view.

In the first place, Tacitus himself in the same account says that whereas the first Christians were executed on the charge of incendiarism, those who were later apprehended on the information given by the first group whose testimony was more openly known, were convicted not simply because of incendiarism, but on the charge of hating humanity ("odium humani generis").<sup>44</sup> Now to the Romans "genus humanum" meant, not mankind in general, but the Roman world – men who lived according to the Roman manner and law.<sup>45</sup> The Christians then were out of accord with Roman law and society, and therefore their actions technically bordered on treason.

This assumption was enhanced by current rumors of secret Christian practices, undoubtedly referred to by Tacitus in his phrase "per flagitia invisos."<sup>46</sup> What the nature of these rumors was at this time we may ascertain through references of a later period. I take the liberty to go beyond the first century in doing this because the only explicit statements of these charges that we have come from a later period, and I think that by using these later references as a base we can infer some idea of the form these accusations took in the time of Nero. It is generally assumed that these stories were originated and disseminated by the Jews.<sup>47</sup> Peter tells the Christians to abstain from fleshly lusts, that "wherein they speak against you as evil-doers ('kakopoion'), they may

by your good works...glorify God...”<sup>48</sup> Justin Martyr, Christian teacher in Rome, writing between 155-160<sup>49</sup> in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, says the Jews cursed in their synagogues those who believed in Christ.<sup>50</sup> Origen (writing in A.D. 246-248) also thusly accuses them: “Jews...when Christianity began to be first preached, scattered abroad false reports...such as” infanticide, incest, etc.<sup>51</sup>

As far as I know Tacitus (writing his *Annals* between 115-117) is the earliest pagan writer to refer to these stories, and Fronto and Celsus, the great pagan opponents of Christianity, are the next to make use of them. After the nature of these charges is seen it is interesting to read the striking admission of Paul (ICor4:10-13) especially with reference to Tacitus’ account. M. Cornelius Fronto (c. 100-175) was a famous Roman lawyer, orator, and writer. He became a senator and was a consul in 143. Some of his letters were discovered in 1815, but his attack on Christianity has never been found. It may well have been part of an address to the senate, given when Christianity was beginning to show strength, about 150-160. Sixty or seventy years later a Latin Christian named Minucius Felix, probably a lawyer in Rome, as internal evidence seems to indicate, replied to Fronto with a dialogue entitled the *Octavius*. In this dialogue there is reference made on different occasions to the work of Fronto, not by the defender and attacker of Christianity, and it seems that some essential parts of Fronto’s work have been preserved in this manner.<sup>52</sup>

The scene of the *Octavius* is laid in Rome. Minucius (called Marcus in the story) tells how a certain Octavius from Africa has come to visit him, and they and a pagan friend, Caecilius, go on a trip to Ostia and the baths. As they go, they pass a statue of Serapis, and Caecilius throws it a kiss. Octavius rebukes his superstition but Caecilius rises to defend his position. They sit down and the debate begins. Caecilius then presents the popular case against the Christians.<sup>53</sup> There is nowhere as full, vituperative, and colorful an exposition from the pagan standpoint of the people called Christians. There are vivid descriptions of incestuous banquets, horrible initiation rites, and practices reminiscent of the old phallic worship, all of which are ascribed to “that gang” of low-down people called Christians. Many of these charges are discussed later in Tertullian’s *Apology*. On one occasion Caecilius directly refers to Fronto as testifying to the incestuous orgies indulged in by the Christians. Later Fronto is again referred to in a similar connection.<sup>54</sup>

The Grecian philosopher Celsus directed a searching attack against Christianity about 178, under the name *A True Discourse*, pointing out the faults both Judaism and Platonic philosophy had to find with Christianity. Other than what Origen tells us, we know nothing of Celsus. He was evidently an Epicurean with many Platonic ideas, and a friend of Lucian the satirist.<sup>55</sup> His work is regarded as the ablest attack of its kind made against Christianity and employs all the aids which the culture of his age afforded and he anticipates most of the arguments and sophisms of the deists and infidels of later times. Still his work gives striking proof of the inability of men in his position to view Christianity objectively and understand Christian truth.<sup>56</sup>

All that we know of this work is derived from quotations in Origen's *Against Celsus*, written between 246-48. About three-fourths of Celsus' work is estimated to have been preserved in this way. Origen was so faithful and so extensive in his use of Celsus that more than one scholar has attempted with good success a reconstruction of the book. It seems certain that the quotations are quite accurate. Origen's work was directed specifically as a refutation of Celsus, and any misrepresentation would have hindered his own cause. An immediate change of style is noted when the language of Origen breaks off and the quotation from Celsus begins.

Although I have been unable to find explicit statements from Celsus concerning the details of these stories, the very first charge he brings forward in his desire to throw discredit upon Christianity is that the Christians entered into secret associations. "And his wish (Origen says) is to bring into disrepute what are termed the 'love-feasts' of the Christians..."<sup>57</sup> Now it was just these gatherings that were referred to by Caecilius in the *Octavius*. These were the exclusive meetings of the Christians when, in the first century, they gathered to remember the Lord's Supper and eat together.<sup>58</sup> Evidently Celsus had referred to these gatherings in a manner similar to Fronto. We wish Origen had preserved a quotation of Celsus on this subject.

The next reference comes from Tertullian. In this passage from his *Apology*, written about 197 and addressed to the "Rulers of the Roman Empire" he is objecting to the lack of opportunity for defense on the part of arrested Christians. "All that is cared about is having what the public hatred demands – the confession of the name, not examination of the charge."<sup>59</sup> He adds:

Nothing like this opportunity for defense given ordinary criminals is done in our case, though the falsehoods disseminated about us ought to have the same sifting, that it might be found how many murdered children each of us had tasted; how many incests each of us had shrouded in darkness; what cooks, what dogs had been witness of our deeds. Oh, how great the glory of the ruler who should bring to light some Christian who had devoured a hundred infants.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout this work are other references to these charges, given in greater detail.<sup>61</sup>

That much explicit accounts of the practices commonly attributed to the Christians come as early as Fronto (c. 150-60) leads me to believe that the "per flagitia invisos" used by Tacitus only 35 years earlier is a reference to the assumption of the Romans of similar practices engaged in by the Christians of the time of Nero. At least we

can say with a good deal of probability that the substance of these awful stories existed in some incipient form in the time to which Tacitus refers. There is a striking parallel between Caecilius' description of the alleged practices of the Christians in the *Octavius* and Livy's account of the Bacchanalian conspiracy during the Republic (186 B.C.).<sup>62</sup> We shall later find occasion to discuss the significance of this parallel in our summary of the causes underlying the Neronian persecution. It is interesting to note that the term "flagitia" is used by Livy in this very passage referring to the Bacchanalian orgies.

We have seen, then, that Tacitus makes reference to the popular attitude toward the Christians in Rome and that Nero's actions were consonant with this attitude. This assumption provides a base upon which we can construct other more direct causal factors underlying the Neronian persecution.

The practical effects of Christianity must have been strongly felt. Divisions were introduced into families, and children set against their parents. We can well imagine the bitterness evoked from many Roman citizens when they learned members of their own families had joined themselves to the "pernicious superstition." Ramsay produces evidence that this hatred of humanity that we have been speaking of above was also generally held to be the crime of poisoners and magicians, and that the punishments inflicted by Nero are those ordered in other instances for magicians.<sup>63</sup> The extraordinary influence which the new religion acquired over its votaries, the reformation which it wrought in its converts, and the enthusiastic devotion of the whole body were all proofs that forbidden arts had been employed and the supernatural element was present.<sup>64</sup>

It is certain that the Jews had been distinguished throughout the Empire as a special people in contrast to all others. Their imageless worship, their stubborn refusal to participate in other cults, together with their exclusiveness, marked them as a unique people.<sup>65</sup> Becoming separate from the Jews, the Christians, as such, now faced the Greek and Romans. Whereas in them some of the Jewish sources of offense (as circumcision, culinary peculiarities, etc.) were absent, these two offenses of imageless worship ("atheotes") and exclusiveness ("amixia") were much more prominent.<sup>66</sup> Later, by 200, the Christians were to be called the third race.<sup>67</sup>

There is a reference in Acts that offers additional evidence for the popular attitude. To my knowledge it has not been cited by any other in this connection. A word should be said concerning this authority before we consider the reference. That Luke the Greek physician wrote Acts as volume two of his history, and that this Luke was the companion of Paul on some of his journeys, is generally accepted by many of the leading critics in the field.<sup>68</sup> The date of Acts is accordingly sometime after 59 when Paul was on his way to Rome, as represented in the last chapter, and before Luke's death, and therefore well within the first century. Harnack postulates three main sources for the first part of Acts, but for chapters XVI, 6 to XXVIII, 31 he thinks Luke was an eyewitness of the events or had received his information from eyewitnesses, and the section is generally speaking reliable.<sup>69</sup> Let us then turn to these chapters and sense the situation. In the Summer of 58 Paul had been arrested by the Jews on the charges of teaching things

against the Jews, the law, and the temple.<sup>70</sup> He was then sent by the Roman officials in Jerusalem to Caesarea and Festus the Roman governor, who sent him and his appeal to Caesar himself in Rome.<sup>71</sup> Arriving in Rome in 61 he met the brethren, and then called together the Jewish leaders of the city to explain his position.<sup>72</sup> Paul, of course, had been a Pharisee, pupil of the great Gamaliel, and was well known in Jewery. Naturally, to keep his point of contact with the Jews in Rome, he had to justify his position – that of being a Jew, yet appealing to the Roman power. These Jewish leaders wanted to hear him out on the matter, so they appointed a day when they should meet again, further expressing the wish to hear a statement of his religious sentiments, adding that “as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against (‘peri men gar tes haireseos tantes gnoston hemin estin hoti pantachou antilegetai’).”<sup>73</sup>

This statement came from non-Christian Jews in Rome who, on hearing Paul on the appointed day, rejected the Gospel. It is significant in that as far as I know, it is the only reference to the popular attitude toward Christians in Rome from the Jews themselves. Let us analyze the passage. In the first place, these Jews called the Roman Christians a sect, i.e., “hairesis.” From the root “haireo,” meaning “to grip,” or “take,” the word is used by Luke elsewhere in Acts to denote a party. Hence the Pharisees and Saducees are called “sects,”<sup>74</sup> and Christians were designated with a tinge of reproach, as the “sect of the Nazarenes.”<sup>75</sup> The term applied by the Jews to the Christians, then, gives the impression that the sect was regarded as a party within the Jewery that was “off the track,” so to speak.<sup>76</sup> We can see first of all then, that there was a distinct cleavage of the two groups. As a matter of fact, it is erroneous to believe that most of the Roman Christians had previously been Jews of Gentile proselytes. Considerable evidence points to this conclusion.

Although undoubtedly there were many Jewish converts in the Roman church, over half of the names mentioned in chapter XV of Romans are Greek or Roman; Paul numbers the church at Rome among the Gentile churches;<sup>77</sup> he includes them among the Greeks and barbarians to whom he is to preach;<sup>78</sup> he addresses them as Gentiles;<sup>79</sup> and he implies that the Romans are among the Gentiles whom he, as a priest, is offering up to God.<sup>80</sup> We are led to believe, then, that the majority of the Roman church was made up of Gentile converts that came to the city from various parts of the empire.<sup>81</sup> But that there was either a considerable number or a powerful minority of Jewish converts who were still Jewish in their thinking and caused no little concern to Paul and his preaching in Rome is evident from statements appearing in letters he wrote to the churches of Colossae and Philippi while he was in Rome at this time.<sup>82</sup>

In referring to the Christians as a party, then, the Jews recognized the Jewish nature and background of the sect called Christians and the nature of their origin within Judaism. There was probably as yet, owing to the Gentile composition of the church, no conflict with the synagogue, but an increasing curiosity concerning these people and the unpopular attitude expressed on all hands against them. It should be remembered that the organization of the church at Rome was probably not as we would suppose. In 58, when

Paul wrote Romans, it seems there was no centralized organization. He does not, as in other epistles,<sup>83</sup> address “the church at Rome,” but says, “to all that are in Rome, beloved of God.”<sup>84</sup> Certain groups of believers rather than one distinct assembly, seem discernible in Romans XVI, and if so, it is safe to assume the organization had not developed too far beyond this point in the six years that followed to the time of the fire and the actions of Nero.<sup>85</sup>

The Jews, then, were saying in effect, “We want to hear what you have to say about these people because we happen to know that they are everywhere spoken against. Why is it that you a Pharisee have become their leader, and because of that fact have to appeal to Rome?” So, in the first place, this reference is indicative of the prevailing relations between the Jews and Christians in Rome. We are almost led to believe the Jews knew little more about them than the average Roman.<sup>86</sup> So it would appear from the manner in which they addressed Paul. However, it might be possible that the statement was the result of caution, seeing as they did, the favor shown Paul by the authorities, or of dissimulation.<sup>87</sup>

Is there any indication of the popular Roman attitude toward Christians in this reference? I believe the phrase “that it is everywhere spoken against” refers not only to the Jewish attitude, but was used by the Jews to include the Roman attitude as well. And if this be the case, we may infer another indication of the attitude mirrored in the account of Tacitus. The word “antilegetai” used in this verse is the same word used by Luke in verse 19 of this same chapter XXVIII and from the context indicates an opposition that may have reached the stage where mere passive annoyance with the sect was taking the form of an active concern. It would not be long before someone would get the idea of issuing a formal complaint, if this had not been done already.

Let us try and imagine what the Romans thought. Here were two groups of religious bodies with certain elements in common. They both observed special days, regarded themselves as an exclusive community, and had an imageless worship.<sup>88</sup> However, the Jews had a much larger and longer established body. They were more “worldly” minded than the Christians. Many of them were wealthy, and large sums were sent annually for religious purposes to Palestine.<sup>89</sup> That they were found in great numbers in Rome we learn from Josephus. Mentioning an embassy which came to Rome from Judaea under Varus (governor of Germany) in the time of Augustus, he says that to the fifty ambassadors sent from Palestine were added over 8000 of the Jews that were in Rome.<sup>90</sup>

The Jews had been first introduced into Rome by Pompey (64 B.C.) as captives after his conquest of Palestine. Thousands had been taken slaves, many of which had been sold in the Roman markets. Thereafter they had flocked to Rome and found patrons in Caesar and Augustus. Julius Caesar granted the Jews a number of exceptional privileges. The main concession was the free exercise of their national religion, and the exception from any duties or services which were irreconcilable with this.<sup>91</sup> But these privileges were for the provincials. One asks the question why these privileges were

given. There were but two alternatives for the Roman government – protect them or put them down, since a neutral policy would have meant constant trouble. And there was no sufficient reason to depart from the usual toleration of provincial cults, since it was not immoral, as many in the past had been and was no danger to the state.

Augustus confirmed and renewed all former privileges and in addition granted free Jews in Rome the undisturbed practice of their religion together with the right of retaining their citizenship.<sup>92</sup>

Though Judaism found fashion among many citizens, and was even introduced into the palace, the Jews were generally disliked. Under Tiberius their rights were interdicted, but they eventually resumed their former position. At Rome many Jews compromised their religion for personal advantage. Later under Claudius they were proscribed, but with better times they returned.<sup>93</sup> The Jews in Rome in the post-Augustan period had diverse occupations, many of which characterize them to this day. There were vendors of old clothing in the Circus Maximus; rich and often titled bankers on principal streets; quack doctors, astrologers, and fortune tellers in the mean quarters of the city, and some even acted as “cultured missionaries” among the aristocracy.<sup>94</sup>

By A.D. 61 we can readily imagine that there was simply no comparison between the two bodies of Jews and Christians with respect to their size. The Jewish influence in Rome was considerable also. A quotation of Seneca preserved in Augustine is illuminating. He says, “the customs of that most accursed nation have gained such strength that they have been received in all lands, the conquered have given laws to the conquerors,” and adds, “the greater part of the people know not why they perform (their rites).”<sup>95</sup> They were in Rome of long standing and the Romans were used to tolerating and dealing with them.

But with the Christians, we have a different situation. The group was largely Gentile, and it was numerically greatly inferior. The Christians’ belief in a separated life must have accentuated the popular conceptions of their aloofness and secretive nature. Paul had told the Roman Christians “Be not fashioned according to this age.”<sup>96</sup>

Further evidence of the position of the Christian church at Rome is obtained from Paul’s admonitions to that church. A word should be said about this epistle to the Romans, previously referred to, before we cite it as an authority. That Paul was its author, and that it was written to the Christians in Rome in 58 has been generally accepted by the great majority of scholars, critical and conservative. “It is today, on all hands, accepted as a genuine work of Apostle Paul.”<sup>97</sup>

The general tone of the admonitions in chapters XII and XIII leads me to believe there was decided opposition to the Christians in Rome at this time, but that this came from the populace itself and not from the state. He says, “Bless them that persecute (‘diokontas’) you; bless and curse not.” “Render to no man evil for evil.” “If it be possible... be at peace with all men.” “Avenge not yourselves.” “If thine enemy hunger feed him.”<sup>98</sup> Paul then urges subjection to the higher powers and defends the judicial authority of the Empire. In these verses of chapter XIII he is representing the state not as

persecutor but as guardian of justice. This situation is just what we would expect the popular attitude to be six years before the fire of Rome and the persecution of Nero. Popular hatred was the necessary antecedent to the active measure taken by the emperor which can only be explained in this light.

While we have the Roman captivity of Paul freshly in mind, perhaps this is the point to indicate another factor behind Nero's singling-out of the Christians. Luke tells us that Paul remained in Rome as a captive for two year, his sole occupation being to abide in his own hired dwelling, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him."<sup>99</sup>

Being held by the imperial guard, there seems little doubt that he was directly under the prefecture of Burrus, who held the office alone at this time.<sup>100</sup> As the soldiers would relieve guard in constant succession, the praetorians were brought one by one into communication with Paul and thus he could say when writing to Philippi, "Now I would have you know brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly able to speak the word of God without fear."<sup>101</sup>

We should notice that the very fact that before Paul came the Christians had been relatively silent because they were not bold enough might indicate that the prevailing attitude of the people or the government towards them was developing in its hospitality. When they saw Paul defy this attitude and preach openly, with none forbidding, it is then that they took courage. The combined influence of the Roman Christians must now have been considerable. And when the Roman populace observed the fair treatment Paul received, as we can well imagine was the case, there was not as much of an obstacle in the minds of those who had been approached with the gospel but had deferred acceptance because of popular or imperial sentiment from joining the group, to prevent them from doing so at this time.

That Peter was also in Rome for a short time about this time is generally admissible and lends significance to our discussion. It is the uniform tradition of eastern and western churches that Peter preached in Rome and was martyred there during the Neronian persecutions.<sup>102</sup> However the various testimonies differ in particular, they can only be accounted for on the supposition of some fact that is basic to all. For these testimonies were previous to any use or abuse of this tradition for polemic or apologetic purposes, heretical, orthodox, or hierarchical. The time of Peter's arrival in Rome and the length of his residence cannot be ascertained exactly. If he was there at all, it must have been after 63, after Paul had written his four Prison Epistles, and after the close of the narrative in Acts, for he is not mentioned in either of these. Since his martyrdom took place after July, 64, (the date of the fire) and probably long before 68, when Nero died, this allows him only a short period of labor there. At any rate, we are not to suppose the claims made by the Roman tradition of a twenty of twenty-five years' episcopate of Peter

in Rome have any historical foundation. Schaff says it “is unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake.”<sup>103</sup> We are quite certain that his preaching in Rome formed the occasion for the gospel of Mark. Clement of Alexandria, writing in about 200, informs us that the people of Rome were so pleased with the preaching of Peter that they requested Mark, his attendant, to put it down in writing.<sup>104</sup> The structure of the book agrees with this.

Whether or not Paul himself had made any converts in the imperial household, we know there were Christians there at the time of his Roman captivity. It would be appropriate to discuss the extent and nature of their presence there, especially in the light of what I think may be another factor behind the Neronian persecution – the presence of Christians among the Roman nobility.

We are able to-day, on the basis of fully authenticated records, to declare, with satisfactory certainty, that *even in the time of the Apostles the palace of the emperor was one of the chief seats of the growing Christian church in Rome.*<sup>105</sup>

Not long after Paul’s arrival in Rome he writes to the church at Philippi<sup>106</sup> and closes his epistle with the words, “all the saints salute you, especially they that are of Caesar’s household.”<sup>107</sup> Paul thus bears witness that about the year 62 there were Christians at the court of Nero, that is, in the imperial household, and in addition, he singles them out for special mention. Why is this? Can we suppose it is because Paul himself preached at the court? Harnack considers this rather unlikely, for Paul’s house, being near the Praetorium, would have been a long distance from the Palatine.<sup>108</sup> About the only alternative is that these Christians must have been previously acquainted with the church at Philippi.

We have already noted the fact that in 58 or 59, before Paul ever came to Rome, he had personally greeted more than twenty persons there in the closing chapter of his epistle to that church. Now among the names we note several which are repeated in the inscriptions as names of slaves belonging to the emperor.<sup>109</sup> These monuments are chiefly sepulchral. From 1726 on several sepulchers have been exhumed. From what I can gather, these are usually found to be columbaria, the occupants of which are almost all freedmen or slaves of the emperors.<sup>110</sup> The frequency of the name Tiberius Claudius and of other members of the imperial family at this time, as Messalina, Octavia, Agrippina, Drusus, etc., have led scholars to believe that though occasionally a name points to a later emperor, the great majority must be assigned to the reign of Nero or his immediate predecessors or successors. Thus the persons to whom they refer were mostly contemporaries of Paul. Besides these special sources, a vast number of isolated inscriptions relating to the servants and dependants of the emperors have been

discovered.<sup>111</sup> By such means we can get some insight into the names and offices of the “household of Caesar” at the date when the expression was used by Paul in the Philippian letter.

Lightfoot discusses fifteen names from Paul’s list of salutations and for each shows one or more inscriptions bearing names identical with them. He comes to the general conclusion that among those saluted in Romans, some members of the imperial household were included.<sup>112</sup> Up to this point in the discussion we cannot say there is real proof of this. But the following considerations are significant.

Only twice in his list of salutations does Paul greet a whole class of persons – the Christians in the household of Narcissus, and those in the household of Aristobulus. (It is significant that the Greek is “aspasasthe tous ek ton Aristoboulou. . . tous ek ton Narkissou tous ontas en kurio.”)<sup>113</sup> These Christians must have belonged to the retinue of two members of the aristocracy. For at the time of the emperor Claudius (41-54) “no one held greater power in Rome, no one stood nearer to the person of the emperor, than a certain Narcissus; and a certain Aristobulus, grandson of Herod the Great, lived at the same time, as a trusted friend of Claudius.”<sup>114</sup> And the Greek “tous ek ton Aristoboulou” is taken by Harnack and Lightfoot to be the equivalent of the Latin “Aristobuliani,” and “tous ek ton Narkissou” for “Narcissiani.”<sup>115</sup> Now it seems probable, considering the intimate relations between Claudius and Aristobulus and Narcissus, that at the death of these two men their servants would be transferred to the palace as was often done in similar instances. In that event they would be designated by these very Latin terms. “Aristobuliani” and “Narcissiani.”<sup>116</sup> Since the household of Aristobulus would naturally be composed in a large measure of Jews, the Gospel would have been more easily introduced to their notice and hence we may conclude a body of believers was early extant within these two households. There is one indication which neither Lightfoot nor Harnack (the only two of whom I am aware that have discussed this problem) has observed that I believe, together with the above evidence, confirms the fact of these two households being retinue of the friends of Claudius. When Paul expresses desire that those of the household of Narcissus be saluted, he adds, “tous ontas in kurio,” “those that are in the Lord.” The natural explanation of this qualification is that some of the household of Narcissus were *not* in the Lord, i.e., were not Christians. And if this is so, they could not have been designated a “household” in so far as that term might be taken to refer to a group of Christians. The only remaining explanation is that the household refers to the retinue of Narcissus.

There is additional evidence for Christians in the court of Claudius that Harnack cites as “proof that is incontestable.”<sup>117</sup>

The letter of Clement, bishop of Rome, to the church at Corinth has already been referred to. At the close of this letter we read:

We have been sent trustworthy and prudent men,  
who have lived among us irreproachably

from youth to old age; and they will be witnesses between you and us...Send back to us quickly our delegates. Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Vito (Bito), together with Fortunatus...<sup>118</sup>

these two old men, Christians of Rome, could easily have been Christians since the year 50. Their names are most significant. Claudius refers to some connection with the emperor's family, and his wife, Messalina, came from the "gens Valeria."<sup>119</sup> Therefore we may conclude these two men belonged directly or indirectly to the household of the emperor and there were Christians at the court of Claudius.

Other references to Christians among nobility are not as good. There seems to have existed a common belief in the church of the fourth century that Nero's teacher, Seneca, was converted by Paul. We have among the writings usually designated as the Apocryphal New Testament the correspondence between the two.<sup>120</sup> When one reads these letters, he strongly wishes they could be authenticated, but such is not the case.<sup>121</sup> The reader is referred to the bibliography for the literature on Seneca's relation to Christianity. (I refer to the supplementary bibliography.) There is no real evidence that demonstrates his Christianity as far as I am concerned.

Hardly more probable is the account according to which a wife of Nero, one Livia (Libia), and many high-ranking officers of the palace were converted by Peter and Paul.<sup>122</sup> The Christianity of Acte, Nero's female slave is a moot question, but hardly conceivable. Renan upholds it on the basis that she first belonged to the gens Annaea, around which, he says, the earliest Christians moved.<sup>123</sup> It is surprising that among her attendants persons are mentioned with the names Onesimus, Phoebe, Stephanus, Artemas, and Crescens, whose names are known to us from the New Testament. However, nothing can be made of this fact and the coincidence could be accidental.

We have a very old Christian story, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*,<sup>124</sup> probably written in the second half of the second century, that rests upon historical accounts.<sup>125</sup> In it we have the story of the martyrdom of Thecla, a disciple of Paul, at Antioch in Asia Minor. It is quite incidentally mentioned in the account that the queen Tryphaena had given the poor girl a very kind reception. It was also said that Tryphaena was a relative of the emperor. This story was considered fable. But now we are informed that about the middle of the first century a certain king Polemon in Asia Minor had a wife named Tryphaena, and that she was related to the emperor Claudius. We even have her picture on a coin.<sup>126</sup> Harnack thinks this could well be the person mentioned in the *Acts of Paul and Tecla* and therefore would be another indication of Christians among the imperial nobility, but sees difficulties in the assumption.<sup>127</sup>

The outstanding convert from the nobility that we know of up to and including the time of Nero's reign is Pomponia Graecina, whom Tacitus mentions in the year 57 (see above).<sup>128</sup> Later, in the time of Domitian, we shall have occasion to note the presence of

Christians among the direct relatives of the emperor himself and the magistrates of the government of Rome.

What of this presence of Christians among the Roman nobility and in Caesar's household? Their presence, though inconsiderable, must have occasioned gossip among the other members of the household, especially among the Jewish servants, who would not scruple to misconstrue the conduct of Christians there or point up certain aspects of their behavior. It would come to their attention that these Christians did not bow to pictures or images of the emperor, and in other ways would not conform. This intelligence would gradually work its way upward until it reached the emperor himself. Hence, what I would like to designate an immediacy of awareness of the Christians as a sect within themselves, peculiar even with respect to Judaism, would have come upon the court. The attitude that would then ensue is well illustrated in an example from Domitian's reign which I shall take the liberty of using at this point.

The consul Flavius Clemens had been executed and his wife banished by Domitian on the charge of atheism.<sup>129</sup> (As we shall see later, these two were Christian converts.) The attitude of Domitian and the court was obviously that of the greatest disdain to put to death a former consul and cousin of the emperor and banish his wife, the niece of Domitian himself. This attitude is reflected in Suetonius. In his account of Flavius Clemens Suetonius directly gives us his own opinion of the man, describing him as one of the "most contemptible indolence ('contemptissimae inertiae')." <sup>130</sup> We are not to believe the man was really indolent, although such could have been the case. Rather, it seems to me, these words express the attitude of a Roman who saw how the Christianity of Clemens made him a poor Roman – how the restraints he exercised as a Christian necessitated his reticence in many affairs of state and society. Tertullian, writing between 198-202, enumerates many things which he thought were impossible for a conscientious Christian of his day: all pagan religious ceremonies; the games and the circus; the oath usual to all contracts; the illumination of doors at festivals, etc.<sup>131</sup> We can safely postulate that the Christian conscience was about as sensitive in the day of Clemens. His position and that of others like him was difficult indeed. It is understandable why his elimination became imperative. Now the point in all this is that a similar attitude was probably developing before July, 64, which, together with the preaching of Peter and Paul in Rome, and the trial of the latter, would have created the immediacy of awareness necessary to Nero's actions after the fire. It was the impulse thus given to the progress of Christianity in Rome which raised the church to a position of prominence and made it a mark for the attacks of the tyrant. Otherwise, its very obscurity or lack of organization would have shielded it.

We are now in a position to discuss what may be another clue to the actions of Nero with regard to the Christians. This lies in the person of Sabina Poppaea. In 58 she became a mistress to Nero, already married to Octavia, who, later in 62 was banished to Pandateria on a false charge and executed.<sup>132</sup> Poppaea now became wife and empress, and Nero was devoted to her until her death in 65.<sup>133</sup>

Josephus leads us to believe she was a Jewish sympathizer. On one occasion, King Agrippa of Palestine had built a room onto the royal palace at Jerusalem that could command a view of what went on inside the temple. The displeasure of the Jews made them build a wall onto the temple so as to intercept the view of the king and also of the Roman guards who could view it from another quarter. The procurator Festus ordered the wall torn down, but the Jews petitioned leave to send an embassy to Nero on the matter. Nero, we are told, forgave the action and let the wall stand “in order to gratify Poppaea, Nero’s wife, who was a religious woman (‘theosebes’ i.e., ‘god-fearing’), and had requested these favors of Nero.” She then kept the two highest ranking Jews of the embassy with her as hostages.<sup>134</sup>

In his *Life* we read how Josephus himself met Poppaea. At the time of the procuratorship of Felix, certain priests who were friends of Josephus had been arrested and sent to Rome to plead before Nero. Wishing to aid in their release, Josephus went to Rome. There he met a Jewish actor, Alitryus by name, who, we are told, was much beloved of Nero. Through the actor Josephus got introduced directly to Poppaea, and on the most convenient occasion asked of her the release of the priests. Josephus, besides this favor, was given many presents from Poppaea and returned to Palestine.<sup>135</sup> We should note here that this incident took place in 63 or 64, when Paul was in Rome.<sup>136</sup> There is no reason to believe why Poppaea was not both in principle and practice a consistent Jewish sympathizer, if not even a secret proselyte.

Nero’s attachment to the Jewish actor has some significance. At this time the Jews must have been enjoying at least a friendly toleration from the government, else such an affinity on the part of Nero and Poppaea to the actor would not have been so frank and well known. Let us note that Poppaea was called a god-fearing woman by a Jew. If she was not a secret proselyte, as some suppose,<sup>137</sup> her attitude toward the Jews was what would be expected if such had really been the case.

Poppaea at least gives us the answer why Nero did not pick on the Jews at this time, who, it is true, were despised by the populace as they always had been. That either she or the Jews, or both put forward the Christians as guilty of having started the fire is conjectural but possible. I do not follow those writers who try to create from the Tacitus narrative the kind of tense emotional situation where the populace is feverishly trying to find a group which it can blame for the fire.<sup>138</sup>

In the first place, as far as the people were concerned, they needed no scapegoat. It was generally believed that Nero was guilty, and Tacitus emphasizes this fact when he says that “not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, not all the stonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration.”<sup>139</sup> In the second place, we are not to suppose the persecution of the Christians took place immediately, as though they were suddenly grabbed in mad revenge. According to Tacitus, the order is this: The fire itself raged for at least six days and seven nights.<sup>140</sup> Then temporary housing was erected. The city was cleared away and laid out on a better

plan. Homes were being rebuilt. This must have taken weeks or months.<sup>141</sup> After this, we are told, the gods were expiated. And *then*, to suppress the rumor of his own guilt were the Christians seized, not to glut the cravings of the mob.

Therefore, it was merely a matter of elimination. The Christians would have been left alone if Nero had not been charged with incendiarism. Since he wished to *shift* the guilt, which once suggested could not be *eradicated*, he could only do that which would not infuriate the people further. Fortunately for him, there was a class of persons in Rome which was disliked by all. On the one hand, the Roman people detested them on the grounds we have seen above. On the other hand, the Jews despised them, as was both natural and obvious. These latter found their representative in Poppaea, who would have prevented Nero from touching them, and possibly guided his selection of the Christians.

We are now in a position to summarize the factors involved in the imperial attitude toward Christians directly following the fire of Rome in July, 64, to the death of Nero in 68.

In the first place, we saw how Nero's action was fully consonant with public sentiment. The Christians were "haters of humanity" who were in turn "hated for their enormities." To the bad taste left in the Roman mouth because of the Jews were added the divisive and exclusive characteristics of the new sect that caused the Roman Jews to say the Christians were everywhere spoken against. Already before Nero's overt action the Christians in Rome had been undergoing private persecution.

To this was added the new attention given Christianity by Paul's trial in 62 and his and Peter's preaching there, which not only added converts to the church, but fired its zeal to hitherto unrealized heights. Christians among the nobility would cause further provocation. Finally, the actions of Nero could have been precipitated by Poppaea and the character of Nero himself. "For such a demon in human shape, the murder of a crowd of innocent Christians was pleasant sport."<sup>142</sup> Add to these the fact that the Christians could be easily selected due to their separated lives, generally outstanding character, and increasing numbers. Loyalty to Christ was actually incompatible with many duties of a Roman citizen. Perhaps lying behind all these was a psychological factor so well expressed by Lightfoot:

For it is in the very nature of a panic that it should take alarm at some vague peril of which it cannot estimate the character or dimension. The first discovery of this strange community would be the most terrible shock to Roman feeling. How wide might not be its ramifications, how numerous its adherents? Once before in times past Roman society

had been appalled by a similar revelation. At this crisis men would call to mind how their forefathers had stood aghast at the horrors of the Bacchanalian conspiracy; how that the canker still unsuspected was gnawing at the heart of public morality, and the foundations of society were well-nigh sapped, when the discovery was accidentally made, so that only the promptest and most vigorous measures had saved the state.<sup>143</sup> And was not this a conspiracy of the same kind? ...the apparent innocence of the sect would seem but a cloak thrown over their foul designs...<sup>144</sup>

I do not believe the peculiar doctrines of the Christians had much to do with their persecution. It is said by some that the Christian belief in the final conflagration of the world was a factor. But in the first place, how many Romans knew of this obscure doctrine mentioned only once in the Scriptures?<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, the persecution began after the fire had long been extinguished. Tertullian tells us that Christians prayed for the welfare of the world, for peace, and for the delay of the final consummation.<sup>146</sup> Neither were the Christian teachings of the kingdom of Christ revolutionary or regarded as such.<sup>147</sup> The same is true of the Christian cosmopolitanism.<sup>148</sup>

### III

We turn now to a brief view of the Roman attitude toward Christianity in the remainder of the first century.

When Nero had once established the principle of condemning Christianity in Rome, his action would have served as a precedent in every province. In the absence of evidence there is no need to suppose a general edict or a formal law. The precedent would be raised in every case where a Christian was accused. We may conclude that between 68 and 96 the attitude of the State towards the Christians was more clearly defined, and that the process was changed so that proof of definite crimes committed by the Christians was no longer required, but acknowledgement of the Name alone sufficed for condemnation. Nero treats a great many Christians as criminals, and punishes them for their crimes. Pliny and Trajan<sup>149</sup> treat them as outlaws and brigands, and punish them without reference to crimes.<sup>150</sup>

In the time of the Flavians (69-96) no uniform imperial *policy* can be discovered. But they could not very well avoid the issue raised by Nero. We have no account of any persecution under Vespasian and Titus is not recorded as a persecutor, his opinion of Judaism and Christianity as stated in the council of war before Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and recorded by Sulpicius Severus is interesting as an approval of Nero's policy.<sup>151</sup>

It is Domitian who stands out prominently as the persecutor of this period.

When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death ...no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career...he finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father Vespasian had planned no evil against us.<sup>152</sup>

So says Eusebius as he begins his account of Domitian's policy toward the Christians. Domitian, emperor from 81-96, seemed to aim his persecution at persons in high position at Rome who were suspected of disloyalty,<sup>153</sup> and supposed descendants of the ancient Jewish kings.<sup>154</sup> Some obscurity rests upon the persecution of Domitian, but it seems clear that what he did was due to political and reformatory motives.

Domitian is said to have arrested and examined the grand children of Jude, the brother of Jesus.<sup>155</sup> For this account Eusebius quotes the early Christian historian Hegesippus, whose work is now lost. From this report, which seems consistent with the

policy of Domitian, and quite reliable, we learn the probably cause behind his attitude. Hegesippus relates that some heretics accused these descendants of Jude of being in the lineage of David and related to Christ. Brought before Domitian, they were asked particularly of the coming of Christ, the nature of his kingdom and its origin and time of appearance, and of their amount of property. They replied that they were poor, and explained that the kingdom of Christ was not an earthly one, but heavenly, and it would be manifested at the end of the world. At this, Domitian released them and is said to have decreed an end to the persecution against the church. If true, it is difficult to understand this later statement. If this whole incident be true, we may infer that Domitian's attitude has a parallel in Herod's, whose interest in Christ centered in the Jewish expectation of the Messiah-King as the restorer of the earthly kingdom of David over the Jews. Eusebius also gives this interpretation of Domitian.<sup>156</sup>

Domitian is also said to have arrested and examined the Apostle John, either owing to his eminence in the church, or perhaps because he was said to be related to Jesus and therefore of the lineage of David.<sup>157</sup> But criticism is divided on this question, some scholars holding to the Neronian exile of John, who in that event would have been banished in about 68.<sup>158</sup>

The letter of Clement to the Corinthians gives what is in all probability another allusion to this persecution. Written in about 95, this letter was written while Clement was head of the Roman church, 88-97.<sup>159</sup> After his salutation, his opening sentence reads, "Dear brothers, because of the sudden misfortunes and calamities which have fallen upon us, one after another, we have been...tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute..."<sup>160</sup>

Dio Cassius tells us that Flavius Clemens, a former consul, and cousin to Domitian, together with his wife Domitilla, Domitian's niece, were accused of atheism ("atheotes") and classed with "many others who drifted into Jewish ways ('Ioudaion ethe exokellontes') and were condemned. Clemens was executed and his wife banished to the island of Pandateria.<sup>161</sup> This he places in the year 848 (A.D. 95). It is certain that these suffered as Christians.<sup>162</sup> From the excavations in the catacombs we know that the cemetery of one Domitilla was owned by the Flavians in the first century. That it was owned by a Christian branch of this family is seen by the inscriptions.<sup>163</sup> Suetonius mentions Clemens in the same connection.<sup>164</sup> He also mentions the execution with others of one Acilius Glabrio, (Dio classes him with Clemens and the others) a senator in exile, adding that Domitian, in the accusation, charged them with practicing "innovation in the State ('molitores rerum novarum')." <sup>165</sup> It is possible that in this instance Domitian's motives for the most part were political.<sup>166</sup> For the sons of Flavius Clemens were the destined successors to the empire. If, together with this, we can believe Domitian was inclined to support and revive the national religion, we can understand his actions. Hence, with Roman citizens of standing a definite charge was necessary, which was atheism, i.e., not so much "sacrilegium" in any technical sense, but a refusal to worship the national gods of the state.<sup>167</sup> It must be remembered that Domitian was very particular as to his

own divinity, insisting that he be addressed at all times as “Our Lord and God”.<sup>168</sup> Whatever were his motives in persecution of the Christians, we can safely say that under Domitian there was a general persecution of the Christians, not only as traitors, but as members of a body “which was notoriously incompatible with the good order and obedience to existing institutions...”<sup>169</sup> That a more general persecution is not mentioned by Dio is explained by the fact that mere execution of ordinary Christians was no more significant to him than the execution of so many thieves.<sup>170</sup>

On the death of Domitian peace was restored to the church which lasted throughout the brief reign of Nerva (96-98). Nerva recalled the banished and refused to treat the confession of Christianity as a political crime, though he did not recognize the religion as a “*religio licita*.”<sup>171</sup> This peace was probably continued through the first thirteen years of Trajan’s reign, up to the time when, in 111, Pliny became governor of Bithynia and issued an edict reminding the populace that Christianity was illegal.

## IV

The following is a compendium of all references to Christianity from non-Christian sources during the first century and one half of its history. An attempt has been made to affix some date to the author, either the date of his writing or the limits of his life.

Mara 74 *A Letter to his Son, Serapion*.

Josephus 94 *Antiquities*. XVIII, 3, 3; XX, 9, 1.

Epictetus 45-120 *Diss.* II, 9, 20; *Diss.* III, 22, 69; *Diss.* IV, 7, 3 and 6; II, 8, 13; II, 26, 4.

Pliny 98-117 *Epistle*. X, 97. In this letter he asks Trajan how the Christians are to be tried, and tells him of the measures he has already taken.

Trajan 98-117 Pliny, *Epistle*. X, 98. Trajan approves of the methods Pliny has been using. A reply to Pliny's letter.

Tacitus 115-117 *Annals*. XIII, 32; XV, 44; Sulpicius Severus, *Hist. Sacr.* II, ad med. This passage, relative to the council of war held by Titus at the siege of Jerusalem has been recovered from the pages of the history of Severus by the acumen of the scholar Bernays. It gives the substance, though doubtless not the precise words, of what Tacitus wrote, and is valuable as showing the distinction between Jew and Christian was clearly recognized by that time. (Haines, *Heathen Contact with Christianity*. P.14f) See endnote 151.

Suetonius 70-150 *Claudius*. 25; *Nero*. 16; *Domitian*. 10, 15, 12 (If "professi" reads "improfessi," as some manuscripts have it, then this passage could refer to Christians.)

Hadrian 117-138 His rescript recorded in Eusebius, *H.E.* IV, 9. Justice is given to Christians under trial. Vopiscus, *Saturninus*. 8. This passage is probably taken from Phlegon's biography of Hadrian. It is on the Christians and Jews in Alexandria.

Phlegon 80-140 Origen, *Contra Celsum*. II, 14. On Christ. Eusebius, *Chronicles*. 148.

Eusebius here cites pagan writers who confirm independently the eclipse and earthquake at the death of Christ.

Dio Cassius 155-235 *Domitian*. XIV. Written in 220 on matters in the year 95 relative to Clemens and Domitilla. *Nerva*. I. This could well be a reference to Christians. It is said here that Nerva did not permit the accusation of people on the ground of Jewish practices.

Aristides 120-189 *Orat.* 46. He compares the degenerate Cynics with the "impious folk of Palestine."

Lucian 120-190 *Hermotimus*. 22. Describes the Christian City of God as told him by one of the "brotherhood."

*Philopseudes*. 16. A reference to the Syrians of Palestine adept at exorcism and the freeing of demoniacs. *Alexander*. 25. A reference to a quack prophet who urged the people to kill the Christians who spoke against him. *Alex*. 38. An interesting passage on how this man ordered the Christians out of one of his meetings. *Peregrinus*. 11. This

man, after incurring the hostility of his neighbors and fellow citizens at Parium, for parricide and immorality, went into voluntary exile, and became a pretended Christian. His exploitation of the Christians due to their simplicity is held up for amusement. There is also a reference to Christ as the founder of Christianity. *Pereg.* 16. The Christians finally disown the man.

Fronto 150-160 Parts of his speech are recorded in Minuscus Felix, *Octavius*. VIII, 1 to XIII, 5. Atrocious practices are ascribed to the Christians.

Antonius Pius 138-161 Eusebius, *H.E.* IV, 26, 9f. In this passage Eusebius is quoting from Melito's (bish. of Sardis) *Apology* to Marcus Aurelius about 170 A.D. In his work Melito mentions Hadrian's rescript and the letters of Antonius Pius warning against riotous action against the Christians.

Marcus Aurelius Eusebius, *H.E.* IV, 13 – Nicephorus (A.D. 850) III, 28. Also Justin, *Apol.* I ad fin. A letter of Antonius Pius to the Commune of Asia. Pius and Marcus Aurelius tried (c. 155) to check mob violence against the Christians, and forbade any innovation in their treatment.

*Meditations*. I, 6. "tales of miracle-mongers"

III, 16. "those who do their deeds behind closed doors."

VII, 68; VIII, 51; XI, 3. On the Christian attitude toward death. Eusebius *H.E.* V, 1, 42.

Mention of a rescript of the emperor on the death penalty to the Christians.

Domitian 81-96 Eusebius, *H.E.* III, 20. Relatives of Christ before Domitian. Eusebius, *Chron. Hieron.* an. Abr. 2114 On Clemens and Domitilla and persecution of Domitian.

Apuleius 120-190 *Metamorphosis*. IX, 14. A doubtful ref. to a bad woman converted to a religion of the one. God.

Galen 129-199 *Peri Diaphoras Sphugmon*. II, 4. On the followers of Christ and Moses.

III, 3. On the difficulty of changing the views of Jews and Christians. Other references are preserved through Arabic authors. Abulfeda (1272-1331) *Hist Antislam*. A quotation from Galen's work on the *Doctrine of Plato's Republic*. He speaks of how Christians derived their teaching from parable. He calls them philosophers and marvels at their chastity, self-control, and disregard for death. Greg. Abulfaragius (912-1286), *Hist. Dynast.* 77, and 78. apud Casiri *Bibl. Arab. Hisp.* I, 253. A quote from Galen's commentary on the *Republic* of Plato. He is astonished at the moral superiority of the Christians and their true exercise of miraculous powers. ("vera miraculorum patratione") *Hist Compend. Dynast.* auctore Greg. Abul. Pharagio Malatiensi medico. A similar reference.

Greg. Abulphargil sive Barhebraei, *Chron. Syriac.* II, 55. A quote from Galen's commentary on the *Phaedo*. Refers to the "men called Nazarenes, who have built their faith on enigmas and miracles." Continence.

Numenius 170 (The Pythagorean) Origen, *Contra Celsum*. IV, 51. Origen tells us that in Numenius' third Book of his work *On The Good* he set forth an allegorical narrative of Jesus. Numenius was approved by Christians because he was willing to examine the Scriptures, showing genuine interest in them.

A Graffito on the Palatine at Rome c. 180. This inscription shows Christ crucified with an Ass's head and a man raising his hand in adoration as he gazes upon it. The caricature is supposed to have been made by one of the royal pages quartered on the spot, and directed against one of his fellow pages. It is now in the Kircher Museum.<sup>172</sup>

Celsus c. 178 *True Word*. About three fourths of this work has been preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum*. It is the most illustrious of the pagan attacks against Christianity.

Matial c. 40-102 *Epigrams*. X, 25

Juvenal c. 60-140 *Sat.* I, 155; VIII, 235; IV ad fin.

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## ENDNOTES

Inasmuch as I have placed the endnotes at the end of the paper, together with the bibliography, I have taken the liberty to omit extensive bibliographical data on the first occurrence of a particular work in the footnotes, as would ordinarily be done.

## INTRODUCTION

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<sup>1</sup> Acts. II, 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Philippians*. pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>4</sup> Lucian, *On the Death of Peregrinus*. XI.

<sup>5</sup> *Epistle to Diognetus*. (anonymous) V.

<sup>6</sup> H.H. Milman, *Hist. of Christianity*. v.3, p. 360 note.

<sup>7</sup> Lightfoot, *Phil.* pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. VI, 11.

<sup>11</sup> After the first century the following works come into use: Beginning with the document called the *Preaching of Peter*, and through the apologies of Aristides, Athenagoras, Justin the Martyr, and Melito, the satire of Hermias, the anonymous *Address to the Greeks* and the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the letters of Theophilus, and Tatian's *Oration to the Greeks*, and Origen's *Contra Celsum*, we find constant reference to the pagan attitude represented in the various periods and fortunes of early church history.

<sup>12</sup> Kirsopp Lake, *Introduction to the Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius. London, Heineman, 1926, p. xxii.

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apology*. I, 5.

<sup>2</sup> So Heinrich Ewald, *Hist Israel*. v. 6, p. 137; Tertullian, *Apol.* I, 5. The apocryphal *Letters and Reports of Pilate* are interesting but obvious inventions of a later period. These appear in the *Apocryphal New Testament*.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew XXVII, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Lightfoot, *Philippians*. p. 16, note. So also Schaff, *Church Hist.* v. 1, p.367, note.

<sup>6</sup> That this banishment was not fully carried out is seen in Dio, who says they were not driven out, but ordered not to hold meetings. Some were punished for not complying with this and other suppressive regulations. *Roman Hist.* LX, 6. Harnack cites this passage to demonstrate the presence of Christians in Rome at the time. "Christianity and Christians at the Court of the Roman Emperors." p. 259.

<sup>7</sup> Schaff, *The Person of Christ*. p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> C.R. Haines, *Heathen Contact with Christianity*. p. 2.

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<sup>9</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*. XIII, 32

<sup>10</sup> Adolf Harnack in what seems to be a little known but very important dissertation confirms the application of this evidence to substantiate the Christianity of Pomponia. “The talented explorer of the catacombs, De Rossi, not only discovered Christian inscriptions from the beginning of the third or the end of the second century, with the title, ‘Pomponius Bassus;’ but also in the sepulcher of St. Lucina, in S. Callisto, he found an inscription of the same age, bearing the title, ‘Pomponius Graecinus.’” (DeRossi, *Roma Stterr*. T. II, pp. 362ff, 728, Tab. il-1. No. 27.) “We may therefore consider the Christian standing of Pomponia Graecina as established, and she is thus the first Christian woman of high birth of whom we know at Rome.” “Christianity and Christians at the Court of the Roman Emperors.” p. 263. Schaff makes similar use of this evidence. *Ch Hist*. v. 1, p. 375 note. Lardner also held this view, but before this evidence was uncovered. *Works*. (in 11 vols.) v. 7, pp. 252-53.

<sup>11</sup> *A Letter of Mara, Son of Serapion*.

<sup>12</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist*. v. 1, pp. 94, 171.

<sup>13</sup> Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum*. London, 1885.

<sup>14</sup> Ewald, *Hist Israel*. v. 6, pp.137-8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. v. 8, p. 727.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Ant*. XVIII, 3, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, XX, 9, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ewald, *Israel*. pp. 138-42. Schaff has a full discussion and summary of opinion on the passage. *Ch. Hist*. v. 1, pp. 92-94

<sup>19</sup> Ewald, *Israel*. p. 140 note.

<sup>20</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist*. v. 1, pp. 331-333. Hereafter any reference to Schaff will refer to v. 1 of his *Church History*.

<sup>21</sup> Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*. p. 308.

<sup>22</sup> Acts XVIII, 12, 17; XXIII, 26; XXIV, 27; XXV.

<sup>23</sup> Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*. v. 2, pp. 96, 91-94.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>24</sup> Cruttwell, *Hist. Rom. Literature*. v. 2, pp. 449-55; *Cambridge Ancient History*. v. 10, pp. 871-73.

<sup>25</sup> Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*. pp. 226-29.

<sup>26</sup> Tac. *Ann*. XV, 44.

<sup>27</sup> So Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*. ch. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Suet., *Nero*. 16. It is interesting that this same word “superstitiois” is the word used by Tacitus when he refers to the religion of Pomponia Graecina. *Annals*. XII, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Ramsay, *Ch. In Rom Emp*. pp. 230-31.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>31</sup> Ramsay is the only one I know who claims this is a reference to the general period of persecution in the generation of Clement himself. *Ibid*. p. 310. Others are unanimous in understanding it to refer to the Neronian period (July, 64 to 68.). I believe it refers to the latter period for the following reasons. Clement classed the martyrdom of Peter and Paul as “nearest ourselves.” When he says following this that besides these great multitude suffered, he does not make what would have been the natural distinction of giving this second group a designation of closer immediacy in point of time than that of Peter and Paul. If indeed, this second group *was* within his own generation, Clement would have been more specific, perhaps naming a few martyrs that would have been known to the group he was addressing as we find done in Revelation. II, 13.

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<sup>32</sup> *Church History*. IV, 23, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Goodspeed, *Hist. Christian Lit.* p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> “According to the legend, Dirce was bound to a raging bull and dragged to death...But the Danaides can furnish no suitable parallel to Christian martyrs, unless...Nero had the sufferings of the Tartarus represented.” Schaff, pp. 388-89.

<sup>36</sup> Clement, *To the Corinthians*. V-VI; Clementis Romani, *Ad Corinthios*... Ed. by Gebhardt and Harnack.

<sup>37</sup> The question has been well raised why there was no civil war within the Empire attendant upon Nero’s persecution. “They were strong enough in numbers, and their organization was the most perfect in the empire. but just as since the time of the apostles they held no religious service without remembering in their prayers the emperor and others in authority, so in these disastrous years they held out till the hour of their deliverance struck. Harnack, “Christianity and Christians.” p. 245. This attitude finds expression in the following early Christian literature: Romans XIII, 1-6; XIV; I Peter II, 13ff; I Timothy II, 1ff; Titus III, 1; Clement, *Ad Corinth.* I, 61; Polycarp, *Ad Philipp.* 12, 3; Justin, *Apol.* I, 14, 17; *Martyrdom of Polycarp.* 10, 2; Theoph., *Ad Antol.* III, 14; Athenagoras, *Supplic.* 37; Tertullian, *Apol.* 30, 31, 32, 39; Tertullian, *Ad Scapul.* 2; Cyprian, *Ad Demeter.* 20; Origen, *Contra Celsum.* VIII, 73; Eusebius, *H.E.* VII, 11, 8; *Constitut. Apos.* VII, 16; VIII, 10.

This does not mean that individuals may not have been borne away into rebellious demonstrations. Of the revolutionary confessions of individuals in *Acta Justin.* 4; Marcelli; Cassiani; (In Ruinart, *Acta Mart. sincera.* 1737.) Tertullian, “De Corona.”; *Ad Scapul.* 5; Eusebius, *H.E.* VI, 40; VII, 11, 22; VIII, 5. Harnack adds that it is certain that “no Christian took up arms against his ruler and emperor, that the Christians never joined in any revolutionary movement (Tertullian, *Apol.* 35; *Ad Scap.* 2.) and that their loyalty was above all suspicion.” (Tert. *Apol.* 37) “Christianity and Christians.” p. 246.

<sup>38</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Nationes.* I, 7; Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicles.* II, 28, 29 (follows Tacitus’ account); Orosius, *History.* VII, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Lardner, *Works.* v. 7, pp. 248-50.

<sup>40</sup> *Inscriptiones Hispaniae Latinae.* v. 2, pp. 1-117.

<sup>41</sup> Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity.* v. 2, p. 298 note. Haines refers to this inscription as “redolent of forgery.” *Heathen Contact.* p. 116.

<sup>42</sup> Orosius, writing about 400, in his *History.* VII, 7; Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicles.* II, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Revelation II, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Tac., *Ann.* XV, 44

<sup>45</sup> Ramsay, *Ch Rom Emp.* p. 236.

<sup>46</sup> Tac., *Ann.* XV, 44

<sup>47</sup> So Haines, *Heathen Contact.* p. 3; Hardy, *Christianity and the Roman Government.* p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> I Peter 2:11, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Goodspeed, *Hist Ch. Lit.* p. 141

<sup>50</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho.* XVI. Also CVIII, XLVII, XCVI, CXVII.

<sup>51</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum.* VI, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Goodspeed, *Chris. Lit.* pp. 221-22.

<sup>53</sup> Minuscus Felix, *Octavius.* VIII-XIII.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 6; XXXI, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist.* v. 2, p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>57</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum.* I, 1.

<sup>58</sup> I Corinthians. XI; Jude. 12. The word “love” (“agape”) connected with such a feast would bring an entirely different connotation to the pagan mind used to thinking in terms of “eros”.

<sup>59</sup> Tert. *Apol.* II.

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- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Tert. *Apol.* VII, VIII.
- <sup>62</sup> Livy, *History*. XXXIX, 8-19 (especially XXXIX, 8); Minucius Felix, *Octavius*. VIII-IX.
- <sup>63</sup> Ramsay, *Ch Rom Emp.* p. 236.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237
- <sup>65</sup> Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*. v. 1, p. 256, also note, where he cites many authorities.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266-78
- <sup>68</sup> Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*. p. 180.
- <sup>69</sup> Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*. In Thiessen, Intro. p. 180.
- <sup>70</sup> Acts XXI, 27-27.
- <sup>71</sup> Acts XXV.
- <sup>72</sup> For a full discussion of the evidence see Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of Paul*. v. 2, pp. 545-47.
- <sup>73</sup> Acts XXVIII, 22.
- <sup>74</sup> Acts XV, 5; V, 17.
- <sup>75</sup> Acts XXIV, 5.
- <sup>76</sup> See Acts XXIV, 14; Foakes Jackson and Lake, *The Acts of the Apostles*. v. 4, pp. 171, 298.
- <sup>77</sup> Romans I, 5-7.
- <sup>78</sup> Romans I, 13-16.
- <sup>79</sup> Romans XI, 13.
- <sup>80</sup> Romans XV, 14-18.
- <sup>81</sup> Romans XVI. This long list of names indicates how many of Paul's acquaintances had moved to Rome. And the three cities of Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus, at which Paul had spent the largest time, were just the three, together with Alexandria, that kept up the most active intercourse with Rome. Thiessen, *Intro.* p. 222. See also Romans XV, 20.
- <sup>82</sup> Philippians I, 15-18; Colossians IV, 10, 11. Lightfoot, *Phil.* pp. 16-18. For indications of Jews in the Christians' assemblies see Romans II, 17; IV, 1, 17.
- <sup>83</sup> I and II Corinthians; Galatians; I and II Thessalonians.
- <sup>84</sup> Romans I, 7.
- <sup>85</sup> Romans XVI, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15; Lightfoot, *Phil.* p. 13. This inference is strengthened when we note that it was only *after* Paul's arrival in the city that the Roman Christians took courage and boldness to "speak the word without fear." Philippians I, 14.
- <sup>86</sup> So also Lightfoot, *Phil.* p. 13.
- <sup>87</sup> Alford, *Greek Testament*. v. 2, p. 308. He refers to Hackett, *Acts*. 1852, p. 392; Lightfoot, *Phil.* p. 15.
- <sup>88</sup> See the remarkable passage in Dio Cassius, *Hist Rom.* XXXVII, 17. He says "They are distinguished from the rest of mankind in every detail of life."
- <sup>89</sup> Cicero, *Pro Flacco*. XXVIII. In Conybeare and Howson, v. 2, p. 369.
- <sup>90</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* XVII, 11, 1. The number of Jews in Rome during the Apostolic age is estimated at twenty or thirty thousand. Harnack, "Christianity and Christians." p. 253. They had, as far as we know, seven synagogues and three cemeteries. They dwelt in the fourteenth region beyond the Tiber (Trastevere), and probably also on the island of the Tiber, and part of the left bank, towards the Circus Maximus. Schaff, v. 1, pp. 363-64.
- <sup>91</sup> Hardy, *Christ. and Rom Govt.* p. 237.
- <sup>92</sup> Philo, *Leg. Ad Caium*. In Hardy, *ibid.*, p.26.
- <sup>93</sup> Merivale, *Hist Romans. Empire*. v. 6, pp. 251-58
- <sup>94</sup> Huidekoper, *Judaism at Rome*. In Harnack, "Christianity and Christians." p. 253.

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- <sup>95</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. VI, 11.
- <sup>96</sup> Romans XII, 2. But especially see II Corinthians VI, 14-VII, the *locus classicus* for the Christian expression on the question of separation. The nature of heathenism demanded such an incompatibility.
- <sup>97</sup> Thiessen, *Intro*. p. 220.
- <sup>98</sup> Romans XII, 14-21.
- <sup>99</sup> Acts XXVIII, 30-31.
- <sup>100</sup> Acts XXVIII, 16; Tact., *Ann.* XII, 42; XIV, 51.
- <sup>101</sup> Philippians I, 12-14.
- <sup>102</sup> Schaff cites a long list of these. v. 1, p. 251.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.
- <sup>104</sup> Clement of Alexandria. From a fragment in Eusebius, *H.E.* VI, 14. See also Euseb., *H.E.* III, 39, the famous passage on the origin of Mark's Gospel.
- <sup>105</sup> Harnack, "Christianity." p. 257.
- <sup>106</sup> Such (A.D. 62) is the generally accepted date for Philippians. See Harnack, *Christianity* p. 257.
- <sup>107</sup> Philippians IV, 22.
- <sup>108</sup> Harnack "Christianity." p. 257. Lightfoot also holds that the Christians in the imperial household were not Paul's converts. *Phil.* pp. 33, 171-178.
- <sup>109</sup> Harnack "Christianity." p. 258.
- <sup>110</sup> Lightfoot, *Phil.* pp. 171-78.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- <sup>113</sup> Romans XVI, 10, 11.
- <sup>114</sup> Harnack, "Christianity." p. 258. For the influence of Narcissus see Tac., *Ann.* XI, 38: "To Narcissus were decreed the decorations of the quaestorship; a very small reward indeed, considering his towering elevation; for he was more influential than Pallas and Callistus." For the position of Aristobulus see Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4 and Lightfoot, *Phil.* p. 175.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>116</sup> Lightfoot, *ibid.*
- <sup>117</sup> Harnack, "Christianity." p. 259.
- <sup>118</sup> Clement, *To the Corinthians*. 63, 65.
- <sup>119</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*. 26.
- <sup>120</sup> *The Apocryphal Books of the New Testament*. pp. 95-99.
- <sup>121</sup> Lightfoot, *Phil.* "The Letters of Paul and Seneca." pp. 329-333. They are a manifest forgery of the fourth century, probably to either recommend Seneca to Christian readers, to recommend Christianity to students of Seneca, or as a mere fiction.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. v. 8, p. 479b.
- <sup>123</sup> Renan, *Antichrist*. p. 106. In Harnack, "Christianity." p. 262.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. v. 8, pp. 487-92.
- <sup>125</sup> Harnack, "Christianity." p. 263.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* For a full discussion see Ramsay, *Ch Rom Emp.* pp. 375-428.
- <sup>128</sup> Tac., *Ann.* XIII, 32.
- <sup>129</sup> Dio, *Rom Hist.* LXIV, 14.
- <sup>130</sup> Suet., *Dom.* 15.
- <sup>131</sup> Tert. *On Idolatry*. XVII; *De cor. mil.* I, 15.
- <sup>132</sup> Tac., *Ann.* XIV, 59-64.
- <sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI, 6.
- <sup>134</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* XX, 8, 11.

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<sup>135</sup> Josephus, *Life*. III.

<sup>136</sup> In this same passage he tells us he went on this mission to Poppaea when he was 26 years of age. He place his birth in the first year of the reign of Caius Caesar. *Life*. I. Since Gaius Caesar Caligula took office in 37, we can date the event at about 63.

<sup>137</sup> Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epp. Paul*. v. 2, p. 421.

<sup>138</sup> Angus, "Nero." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. v. 4, p. 2137.

<sup>139</sup> Tac., *Ann*. XV, 44.

<sup>140</sup> Suet., *Nero*. 38; Tac., *Ann*. XV, 40.

<sup>141</sup> If the traditional date of Peter's martyrdom is correct, there would be an interval of nearly a year between the fire of July 19.64, and his death in June, 65. Schaff, *Ch Hist*. v. 1, p. 381 note. This would imply one of two things. Either the persecution did not begin until a year after the fire, or it began shortly after the fire and lasted until or after that date. But his at best is rather slim evidence for conjecture.

<sup>142</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist*. v. 1, p. 379.

<sup>143</sup> Livy, *History*. XXXIX, 8-19.

<sup>144</sup> Lightfoot, *Phil*. pp. 26-27.

<sup>145</sup> II Peter III, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Tert. *Apol*. XXXIX. However, there is good evidence for the opposite view in the statement of Caecilius, "Further, they threaten the whole world and the universe and its stars with destruction by fire..." Minucius Felix, *Octavius*. XI, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Euseb., *H.E*. III, 20, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Tert. *Apol*. XXXVIII, XXXIX; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. XVII, 2; XXXI, 8; XXXVII, 10; Lucian, *Perigrinus*. 13.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>149</sup> Pliny, *Letters*. X, 96.

<sup>150</sup> Ramsay, *Ch in Rom Emp*. p. 245.

<sup>151</sup> "It is said that Titus first took counsel and deliberated whether he should destroy a temple of such workmanship. For some thought that a sacred edifice, famous beyond all works of men, ought not to be destroyed; for if saved it would be a witness to Roman moderation, but destroyed would affix to them an everlasting stigma of vandalism. Some on the other hand and Titus himself were for the destruction of the Temple first and foremost, that the religion of Jews and Christians might be the more completely eradicated, inasmuch as these two religions, though opposed to one another, yet originated from the same sources. The Christians being an offshoot for the Jews, let them remove the root, and the stock would readily wither away. So, by God's will, the feelings of all being worked up, the Temple was destroyed." (In Haines, *Heathen Contact*. p. 51.)

Their passage has been recovered from the pages of Sulpicius Severus by the acumen of Bernays. It gives the substance, though doubtless not the precise words, of what Tacitus wrote, and is valuable as showing that the distinction between Jew and Christian, though misunderstood, was clearly recognized at this time.

<sup>152</sup> Euseb., *H.E*. III, 17.

<sup>153</sup> Suet., *Dom*. 10.

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<sup>154</sup> Euseb., *H.E.* III, 20.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Haines, *Heathen Contact*. p. 25; Revelation I, 9.

<sup>158</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist.* v. 1, pp. 428-29.

<sup>159</sup> Euseb., *H.E.* III, 16; IV, 23; Goodspeed, *Hist Ch Lit.* pp. 10-11. See also above, p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> Clement, *To the Corinthians*. I, 1.

<sup>161</sup> Dio, *Rom Hist.* LXVII, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Ramsay, *Ch in Rom Emp.* p. 261.

<sup>163</sup> Lowrie, *Monuments of Early Church*. P. 65.

<sup>164</sup> Suet., *Dom.* 15; Euseb., *H.E.* III, 18.

<sup>165</sup> Suet., *Dom.* 10.

<sup>166</sup> Ramsay, *Ch in Rom Emp.* pp. 274-78.

<sup>167</sup> Hardy, *Christ. and Rom Govt.* p. 88.

<sup>168</sup> Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.

<sup>169</sup> Hardy, *Christ and Rom Govt.* p. 90.

<sup>170</sup> Ramsay, *Ch in Rom Emp.* p. 269.

<sup>171</sup> Schaff, *Ch Hist.* v. 2, p. 45.

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>172</sup> Haines, *Heathen Contact*. p. 33. Much of the information in this compendium has been drawn from this work.