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## THE MARTYRS

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Throughout the world today, thousands of Christians are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. The same was true for the early church.

One of the earliest accounts of Christian persecution found outside of the Bible comes from two enemies of Christ. Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. And the other, the Roman Emperor Trajan. Both men persecuted the early Christians for not worshipping the false gods of Rome.

In a letter dated to around 112 A.D., Pliny wrote the following to the Emperor Trajan:

“It has always been my custom to ask my lord for instructions on all unclear issues. For no one can give me better advice and guidance on matters where I have had no previous experience. Since I have never taken part in the trials of Christians, I would like to know what crimes they should be punished for, should I investigate them, and to what extreme. It is also unclear to me as to whether or not I should treat the young and the old alike, or should I discriminate on the basis of age. Should I grant pardons to those who have recanted. Or should I punish him even though he has ceased to be a Christian, because of his past association with this name, or are only specific offenses to be punished.

Currently, in cases brought before me of those who have been accused of being Christians, I have observed the following procedures: First, I interrogated them to find out whether or not they were **Christians; those who confessed, I threatened to punish, as they endured a second and a third interrogation, after which; those who would not recant, I ordered executed.** For there is no doubt in my mind, that regardless of the nature of their gospel, stubbornness and firm defiance surely de-

serve punishment. There were others who held the same nonsense; but because they were Roman citizens, I commanded that they should be transported to Rome." [Note: this statement confirms Rome's great respect offered to its citizens such as found in the case of the apostle Paul in Acts 22:27-29.]

"As normally happens, because of the investigations, many accusations began to spread and many ordeals took place. On one such occasion, an anonymous record was put on public display which contained the names of many people. Of them, those who denied that they were Christians or had been one previously, when they offered up praise to our gods in the words I dictated, and with prayers brought incense and wine before a statue of your image, which I had ordered setup for this reason with the statues of the gods, and they also cursed Christ-- **none of these things, it is said, those who are true Christians can be forced to do--** these I allowed to go free. Others on the informant's list admitted that they were Christians, but then denied it, saying that three years ago they stopped being one, others said they stopped many years earlier, some as long as twenty-five years ago. They all bowed down to your image and the statues of our gods, and cursed Christ.

They all believed that the only thing that they had done wrong in the past was **to meet on a weekly appointed day before sunrise and to sing hymns to Christ as to a god, and pledged not to commit crimes, but rather to refrain from committing fraud, theft, adultery, false reports, and to keep their word when called upon to do so. Afterwards, it was their tradition to depart and to gather later on in order to eat food--but ordinary and innocent food.** Even these actions, they said, they no longer carried on after my edict in which, by your instructions, I disallowed all political gatherings. In order to find out the truth about this

movement, I decided to torture two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But all I discovered was that they blindly followed a superstition.

I therefore decided to halt the investigations and to await your instructions. Because of the great number of people involved, I thought it best to seek your advice. For all members of our society will be affected regardless of their age, rank, or gender. For this superstition has spread like pestilence into our cities, villages and farms. But it does seem possible to me that it can be stopped and even cured. It is also evident that the once deserted temples have now begun to be visited once again, and that the religious ceremonies which in the past were forgotten, are now starting up again. Sacrificial animals are being brought from many districts, where previously there was no need for them. Therefore, I can envision a time when the multitudes will be reformed, if only they are given an opportunity to do so."

### **Trajan's reply to Pliny:**

"My dear Pliny, You have followed the proper guidelines in examining the cases of those who had been accused to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rules to serve as a kind of fixed standard on this issue. They are not to be sought out; but if they are found out and proven guilty, they are to be condemned, with the following exception, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it, by worshiping our gods, no matter what his past involvement, he should be granted a pardon. And accusations that have been posted by anonymous sources should not be used as evidence in any proceedings against them. For this would not be in keeping with the spirit of our age and would set a very dangerous example for others to follow."

Another account of Christian persecution of the early church comes from Suetonius. He was a early

historian who served as a court official under the Roman Emperor Hadrian. In his work entitled the lives of the Caesars he wrote the following: **“Nero inflicted persecution on the Christians”**

### **A Roman Citizen’s greatest statements regarding Persecution:**

“ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 35-39



“And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy . . . And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Hebrews 11:35-40

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