

PERSECUTION & THE LAPSED

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY – FALL 2023

WHY WERE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

- Refusal to worship pagan gods
- Worship of a crucified criminal
- Confusion over beliefs and practices
- Rapid growth

HOW WERE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

- Imprisonment, torture, execution, social and economic discrimination
- Burning, dismemberment, crucifixion, lions
- By the government and by individuals
- 10 significant waves of persecution before Constantine's conversion
- Nero, blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome in 64AD (martyred Paul and Peter)
- The most severe persecution was the final wave under Diocletian (1000s publicly executed).

WHO WERE THE LAPSED?

- Denied the faith to avoid persecution
- Public sacrifices to pagan gods

DEBATE OVER THE LAPSED

- Should lapsed Christians be allowed to return to the church when persecution ended?
- Cyprian – argued that the church should forgive those who repent
- Cornelius, elected bishop of Rome in 251, sided with Cyprian
- Novatian led a revolt on the belief that the lapsed should remain excommunicated
- Novatian was declared a heretic and was himself excommunicated

EARLY PATRISTIC APOLOGISTS

- Types of Apologetics
 - Public Defenses – written to clear Christians of wrongdoing (cannibalism, atheism, rebellion, etc.)
 - Pagan Evangelisms – written to win pagans to the faith
 - Jewish Evangelisms – written to win Jews to the faith
- Justin Martyr
 - Mid-2nd century travelling evangelist
 - Apology I and II
 - Christians keep the peace and pray for the emperor
 - Christianity is a better philosophy
 - Dialogue with Trypho the Jew
- Tertullian of Carthage
 - Late 2nd – early 3rd century African lawyer
 - Used Roman law to defend Christianity
 - First to write extensively in Latin
 - First used the word “Trinity”
- Clement of Alexandria
 - Early 3rd century Egyptian writer
 - Heavily influenced by Greek philosophy
 - Wrote extensively on the Trinity and the Incarnation
- Origen of Alexandria
 - Student of Clement
 - Wrote the first systematic theology
 - Condemned in the 5th century for some unorthodox views (pre-existent souls and denial of eternal punishment)

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CHRISTIANS WHO LIVED BETWEEN THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES AND CONSTANTINE?