

NO COMPROMISE, THE EARLY CHURCH'S RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD FOR ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST THE KING.

“During the first few centuries after Jesus Christ, a great conflict arose between Rome and Christ’s followers. By Roman theory, the state was the one society that must engross (*take up, control*) every interest of its residents: religion, social, political and humanitarian... The state was all in all... Such a theory the Church, as the living kingdom of Jesus, could not possibly accept...

...The great conflict between Rome and Christ’s followers was inevitable. It was the direct result of the genius (*a special quality that characterized a people*) of Christianity. Romans only wanted Christians to take their part as loyal citizens of the empire, discharging the dues (*performing the obligations or demands*) of a citizen. The Christian replied, “We worship no other.”

All new societies were required to obtain permission from the emperor or from the senate... The extreme penalty for members of an unregistered club was treason, punishable by death. **The Empire became all the more jealous when the Church absolutely refused to register with the STATE. The Church would not obtain such formal recognition.**

Christians would not compromise with the world. They would never bow their knee to the emperors. For the Christian, there was but one Lord and Master, to whom he owed supreme allegiance. **He was prepared to prove that allegiance by the renunciation of all things, even his very life.**

At the **root of the struggle was the conflict between Emperor of a moment and the King of endless ages.** Christians were not persecuted because of their creed, but because of the absoluteness of the Christian faith. They were condemned because of **their supreme loyalty to a law and throne outside the Roman law and throne.** “We must obey God rather than men,” they said.

For 200 years, the mere profession that Jesus Christ is Lord was in and of itself a crime. To say that *Jesus is Lord* was almost the only plea for which there was no forgiveness. In the trial of a Christian, all investigation was dispensed with (*exempted or released*). All that was necessary for condemnation was confession of the Name.

By the third century, emperors were realizing that the Church was not a mere body of anarchist to be rooted out wherever necessary. The Church was fast becoming a rival organization of growing strength and power. The aggressiveness of Christ’s followers was viewed by Rome as a very real threat to their worldwide domination.

By the middle of the third century, the more energetic rulers organized efforts to crush out the Church by the use of all the resources of the state. The police measures taken at Antonines (*Roman Emperors who ruled between 138 and 180: Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius*) gave place to a civil war without quarter (*mercy offered*). But, unlike all other civil wars, only one side was armed. Strange to say, this was the side that was ultimately defeated. On the one hand were the immense resources of the Empire, centralized in one supreme will. On the other side was the **PASSIVE RESISTANCE OF CHRIST’S FOLLOWERS**, making the state’s massive recourses useless.

The governing classes persecuted Christianity because they saw clearly its political danger. The lower classes had an intense hatred for the new religion because it was “A THING APART.”

The two causes of hatred were in reality one—the **people hated the Christian’s separateness.**

The Christians were a peculiar people, with peculiar views of their own. They wore no distinctive garb (*clothing: outward appearance*) in the world, yet they were definitely *not of the world*. “We are suppose to live aloof from crowds,” said Tertullian, an early Church leader. Their opponents phrased the matter differently. They are “a people who separate themselves and break away from the rest of mankind.”

The sincere Christian who tried to follow the Light found many difficulties confronting him. For instance, the relation of the Christian to business life of the world was no small difficulty. **It was hard to find an occupation in which the Christian could engage without compromising with idolatry. Some said that if they did not compromise, they would be cut off from every means of livelihood.** Tertullian replied that, “faith must despise starvation as much as it despises death.”

Despite the fact that Christians were shut out of many trades, they won for themselves no small wealth. The Church exalted the value and need to work. In a population bent on “bread and games,” where a middle class scarcely existed, an earnest, industrious brotherhood, which shunned idleness, could not fail to prosper. **But the more the Christians prospered, the more their neighbors hated them.**

The most powerful cause of hatred yet remains. The Christians professed, “nothing was more alien to them than politics.” In reality, from the standpoint of the Roman governor, they were *intense politicians of a most dangerous type*. **Christians were not anxious to run counter to the law and customs of the Empire. But if at any time such law and custom came into conflict with the will of God, as interpreted by each individual, they must obey God, rather than men.** To the Roman executive, who demanded absolute submission of will and life from all its subjects, such a doctrine was clear danger to State. **They could not overlook the existence in their midst of a “new people,” who proclaimed openly that they “look for a kingdom.” They went so far as to refuse to obey any law, which ran contrary to Christ, and daily the *THIRD RACE* grew in number, influence, and wealth.**

In practice, Christianity and the Empire proved fundamentally antagonistic. They were rivals in conception and method. Each claimed to be a kingdom of universal sway; each created a Church of universal obligation, each demanded absolute loyalty to its supreme lord. **Between Caesar and Christ there could be no compromise.**

Such were the main causes of the charge against Christianity of “hostility to the state.” **Persecution was the direct outcome of the Christian DOCTRINE OF RENUNCIATION. To renounce meant to disown, reject and disclaim. The early Christians were renouncing their allegiance to the Roman Empire and denying any connection to it.**

The causes that led to popular and official hatred were not theological. They were a outcome of the fundamental tenet (*beliefs*) of primitive Christianity: **that the Christian ceased to be his own master, ceased to have his old environment, ceased to hold his old connections with the state. In everything, he became the bondservant to Jesus Christ.** In everything he owed his supreme allegiance and fealty (*loyalty*) to the new Empire with Jesus Christ as Head. “We engage in these conflicts as men whose very lives are not our own... We have no master but God,” said Tertullian.

The martyrs were witnesses to the absoluteness of the Christian faith. The religion of Jesus would have nothing to do with the current popular practices of compromising with governments of the world. With sublime (*awe-inspiring*) audacity (*daring or willingness*) the followers of Jesus proclaimed that Christ must be all in all. **Today we suffer from the curse of compromising with the world, which gnaws at the heart of the Church. The accommodated “Christianity” of today would never have conquered the world.**

Time after time we find Roman judges striving to draw the martyrs into compromising their beliefs, and thus obtaining their liberty. But the martyrs refused to purchase life by any compromise between their faith and “the world.”

We need to once more catch the martyr-spirit—a believer in the absoluteness of the Christian faith. The Church is to be “a peculiar people” whose strength does not lie in any blending of light and darkness, but in her renunciation of and aloofness (*apart*) from “the world.”

Critics have found fault with primitive Christianity for being too unworldly and ascetic (*self-denial*), and have pointed to the more excellent means of modern times. But twentieth-century ideals of renunciations would never have caused the gigantic revolution that overthrew the Roman Empire.

The great renunciation of the world by the early Christians did more than anything else to make the Church strong enough to conquer the world. **The martyrs were witnesses to the truth that only by renouncing “the world” can we really do anything for it.** (*Persecution in the Early Church,*

A Chapter on History of Renunciation, by Herbert B. Workman, 1906) (End of excerpt)

Lets start bring it home. God doesn't expect us to live this RADICAL now? Right? We are in the 21st century! We are more sophisticated than the primitive church. Well, I believe we need to examine the Scriptural evidence to determine the answers. This we can be sure of: what we are doing currently isn't working. I believe we can all agree that we need change.