

they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

I think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.

If you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire."

If you have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

If you have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The Persecution of Christians

The Romans were most considerate of the religions of other peoples, though they would not tolerate human sacrifice or beliefs that undermined civic loyalty. Even the Jews, who abso-

lutely and stubbornly rejected emperor worship and the state cults, were given special treatment. The Christian groups, however, raised more serious questions. Christians not only refused to worship the emperor and serve in the army, but they also extended their influence everywhere, caused riots, and insisted that Jesus, who had been executed as a rebel of the state, was the Lord and thus was above all emperors on earth. Their refusal to take part in state ceremonies was considered as a sign of their disloyalty.

At the beginning of the second century, the persecution of Christians was neither systematized nor organized, as the letters between Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, and the Emperor Trajan illustrate. The fears, the indecision, and the tolerance of the Romans can be seen in this correspondence. Christian leaders, nevertheless, did not escape torture and martyrdom. Roman brutality and the heroism of the martyrs, as portrayed by the Christian historian Eusebius (c. 260—c. 340), brought many converts to the new faith.

The Correspondence Between Pliny and Trajan Pliny's Letter to the Emperor Trajan

It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials of the Christians, I am unacquainted with the method and limits to be observed either in examining or punishing them. Whether any difference is to be made on account of age, or no distinction allowed between the youngest and the adult; whether repentance admits to a pardon, or if a man has once been a Christian it avails him nothing to recant; whether the mere profession of Christianity, . . . or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable—in all these points I am greatly doubtful.

In the meanwhile, the method I have observed toward those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it, I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PLINY AND TRAJAN. Source: Pliny, *Letters*, translated by William Melmoth, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Vol. II, pp. 401-05, 407. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library.

preferred, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that . . . inflexible obduracy deserved chastisement. . . .

These accusations spread (as is usually the case) from the mere fact of the matter being investigated, and several forms of the mischief came to light. A placard was put up, without any signature, accusing a large number of persons by name. Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ — none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing — these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that inferior at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; truly they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. . . .

They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt or their error was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was Lent, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud [or] theft or . . . to falsify their word, nor to give a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate and then reassemble to partake of food — but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. . . . I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth with the assistance of torture from two female slaves who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition. . . .

The matter seemed to me well worth referring to you — especially considering the numbers endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. . . .

Trajan's Reply

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the

fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished, with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods), he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed [affixed] must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.

Martyrs for the Faith

There were also arrested certain heathen slaves of our members, since the governor had publicly commanded that we should all be prosecuted, and these, by the snare of Satan, fearing the tortures which they saw the saints suffering, when the soldiers urged them, falsely accused us of . . . things which it is not right for us either to speak of or to think of or even to believe that such things could ever happen among men. When this rumor spread all men turned like beasts against us, so that even if any had formerly been lenient for friendship's sake they then became furious and raged against us, and there was fulfilled that which was spoken by our Lord that "the time will come when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Then at last the holy martyrs endured sufferings beyond all description, for Satan was striving to bring some blasphemy even from them, and all the fury of the mob and of the governor and of the soldiers was raised beyond measure against Sanctus, the deacon from Vienne, and against Maturus, who was a novice but a noble contender, and against Attalus, a Pergamene by race, who had always been a pillar and support of the Christians there, and against Blandina. . . .

Maturus and Sanctus and Blandina and Attalus were led forth to the wild beasts, to the public, and to a common exhibition of the inhumanity of the heathen, for the day of fighting with beasts was specially appointed for the Christians. Maturus and Sanctus passed again through all torture in the amphitheater as though they had suffered nothing

MARTYRS FOR THE FAITH. Source: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, translated by Kirsopp Lake, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Vol. I, pp. 413-33. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library.

before, but rather as though, having conquered the opponent in many bouts, they were now striving for his crown. Once more they ran the gauntlet in the accustomed manner, endured the worrying of the wild beasts, and everything which the maddened public, some in one way, some in another, were howling for and commanding, finally, the iron chair, in which the roasting of their own bodies clothed them with its reek. Their persecutors did not stop even here, but went on growing more and more furious, wishing to conquer their endurance, yet gained nothing from success beyond the sound of the confession which he had been accused to make from the beginning.

That after a long time, when their life still remained in them through the great contest, they were at last sacrificed, having been made a spectacle to the world throughout that day as a substitute for all the varieties of gladiatorial contests; but Blandina was hung on a stake and offered as a prey to the wild beasts that were let in. She seemed to be hanging in the shape of a cross, and by her continuous prayer gave great zeal to the combatants while they looked on during the contest and with their outward eyes saw in the form of their sister Him who was crucified for them, to persuade those who believe in Him that all who suffer for the glory of Christ have forever fellowship with the living God. Then when none of the beasts would touch her she was taken down from the stake and brought back into the jail, and was thus preserved for another contest.

In addition to all this, on the last day of the gladiatorial sports, Blandina was again brought in with Ponticus, a boy of about fifteen years, and they had been brought in every day to see the torture of the other, and efforts were made to force them to swear by the idols, and the mob was furious against them because they had remained steadfast and disregarded them, so that there was neither pity for the youth of the boy nor respect for the sex of the woman. They exposed them to all the torments and put them through every torture in turn, trying to make them swear but not being able to do so. For Ponticus was encouraged by the Christian sister, so that even the heathen saw that she was exhorting and strengthening him, and after nobly enduring every torture he gave up his spirit. But the blessed Blandina, last of all, like a noble mother who had encouraged her children and sent them forth triumphing to the king, having herself endured all the tortures of the children, hastened to them, rejoicing and glad at her departure as though invited to a marriage feast rather than cast to the beasts. And after scourging

ing, after the beasts, after the gridiron, she was at last put in a net and thrown to a bull. She was tossed about a long time by the beast, having no more feeling for what happened to her through her hope and hold on what had been entrusted to her and her converse with Christ. And so she too was sacrificed, and the heathen themselves confessed that never before among them had a woman suffered so much and so long.

The Triumph of Christianity

Christianity spread and flourished amid the waves of imperial persecution. At the beginning of the fourth century, after another period of fierce repression, it was granted tolerance. Henceforth, with the exception of one, all Roman emperors favored Christianity. As the old state religion began to lose ground, the emperors withdrew from it their official support. Not interested in religion as such, they wanted only to unite the Empire, and unity could now be more effectively accomplished with the help of the Christians. Under the Emperor Theodosius I (379-395) the edict given below was issued, proclaiming Christianity the official religion of the Empire and making all other faiths illegal and subject to punishment.

It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our clemency and moderation should continue in the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it hath been preserved by faithful tradition; and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize

Source: Henry Bettenson, editor, *Documents of the Christian Church*, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, pp. 31-32; and from *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, edited by the Reverend B. J. Kidd, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1911. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.