



The Response of Early Christians



— *It was the Christians who were able to resist religious mixtures, syncretism. This speaks volumes of the strength of their worldview. This strength rested on:*

- *God being an infinite-personal God.*
- *His speaking in the OT, the life of Jesus and the NT in ways people could understand.*
- *Thus, Christians had knowledge about the universe and mankind that people cannot find out by themselves and they had an absolute by which to judge society and the political state in which they lived.*
- *And they had grounds for basic human dignity and the value of the individual made in the image of God.*

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- *They were not killed because they worshiped Jesus. Nobody cared who worshiped whom as long as the worshiper did not disrupt the unity of the state centered emperor worship.*
- *Christians were killed because they were rebels, especially after their rejection by the Jews lost them the immunity granted since Julius Caesar's time.*
 1. *They worshiped Jesus as God and worshiped the infinite-personal God only. Worshiping the one and only God was counted as treason. They rejected all forms of syncretism. All other gods were false gods.*
 2. *No authoritarian state can tolerate those who have an authority by which to judge that state and its actions. The Christians had that absolute in God's revelation.*

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- *Even though Emperor Constantine ended persecution of the Christians, legalized Christianity (313) and made it the official state religion (381) most people went on in their old ways.*
 - *Apathy was the chief mark of the later Empire as seen in lack of creativity in the arts. Officially sponsored art was decadent.*
 - *The elite preferred social life to intellectual interests.*
 - *Rome slumped lower and lower aggravated by inflation and a costly government.*
 - *Authoritarianism increased to counter apathy such as laws passed to bind small farmers to their land.*
 - *So few thought the old civilization worth saving.*
 - *Invasion by the barbarians completed the breakdown but Rome fell because it had no sufficient inward base.*

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— Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* said the following 5 attributes marked Rome at its end:

1. *A mounting love of show and luxury (affluence);*
2. *A widening gap between the very rich and the very poor (among countries and within a country);*
3. *An obsession with sex;*
4. *Freakishness in the arts, masquerading as originality; and*
5. *An increased desire to live off the state.*

Look familiar?