

## Studies in Church History

### Early Church History

#### Church and State Relations before Constantine AD 64 - AD 303

##### Introduction

1. Commencing with any study of the history of the Church necessitates some explanation of the importance of Church History. To some, it may seem an unnecessary study, as if it is an encouragement for the Christian to be living and enjoying the past rather than the present. We must, of course, avoid the tendency to idolise the past or to escape the present by fleeing into history however spiritually enriched some historical periods were. Yet, of course, the past can speak into the present, "*being yet dead he speaks*".

2. If we take seriously the Pauline conception of the Christian Church as the Body of Christ, then Church History may be regarded as the continuation of the story of Jesus. That is to say, Jesus, who began to act and teach on earth in the years immediately preceding AD 30, has continued to act and teach since that year by His Spirit in His servants. The history of Christianity ought to be the history of what He has been doing and teaching in this way down to our own times—a continuous Acts of the Apostles. But this is not how Church is usually viewed or presented.

3. The real history of Christianity is the history of a great spiritual tradition. Clement of Alexandria (150-215) compared the Church to a great river receiving affluence from all sides. The great river sometimes flows impetuously through a narrow channel; sometimes it spreads like a flood; sometimes it divides into several streams; sometimes, for a time, it seems to have been driven underground. But the Holy Spirit has never left Himself without witness. If we will put aside a great deal of what passes for Church history, and what is really a rather unedifying branch of secular history, and follow the course of the religion of the Spirit and the Church of the Spirit, we shall judge very differently of the relative importance of events from those who merely follow the fortunes of institutionalism.

4. The difficulty for the would-be historian is this; it is relatively easy to trace the fortunes of the visible institution (i.e. secular history), whereas the course of a great spiritual tradition is much more elusive. And yet, the two are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to treat the one without constant reference to the other. If we think of the Gospel of the New Testament being a bright and glorious light shining through the corridors of history, we can, at times, observe the lamp (i.e. Church) to be so grimy that the light is obscured. Additionally, we do sometimes find that the messenger has distorted the message that he bears, or acts in such a way that he impairs its credit. When this does happen it is more important to trace the fortunes of the message than to enlarge on the misbehaviour of the messenger.

5. Church history has many lessons to teach us and it is useful at this stage we consider them in order that we may profit from our studies.

a) In the first place Church History presents many serious warning signs helping to us learn from the mistakes of the past. The heresies and cults which we see arising in the 19th century, such as Jehovah's' Witnesses; Mormons; Christian Sciences and Seventh Day Adventists, all find their origin within the pages of early Church History. The fact is that there is nothing new, and the Church has always had to contend with apostasy, departures from the orthodox truth of the Word of God.

b) We owe a serious debt to the Church of the past for the structure of much of our evangelistic doctrine and Christian practice that we accept today. Through the centuries the Church has hammered out on the anvil of time the great Creeds and Dogmas which have proved to be the very backbone of the Church. Foundation doctrines, which we hold so precious, have been systematised through Councils and Reformations; men and women have fought, struggled, argued and even died for the "*Faith once for all delivered to the Saints*". It is not that the Church itself has created the Truth, but rather it has defended the truth from opposition and destruction, and also sought to explain, define and expound its truth in understandable form.

c) A study of Church History is a study of the glory of God who through His divine sovereignty has built and preserved His Church. Church History proves the truth of the words of Jesus, "*I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*". Church History demonstrates repeatedly the Holy Spirit's power in preserving and spreading the evangelical true Gospel in the face of Satan's counterfeits and attempted sabotage of the work of God. It is therefore a perfect example of Divine Majesty reflecting God's grace and love for His people. Church History is but a study of the glory of God

6. There are two ways of studying Church history. In the first place, we can concentrate on people, places, names, dates and events. It is important for us to grasp the context, the flow of historical events and therefore possess an over-all grasp of the history of the Church itself. Secondly, we can study and concentrate upon the theology or the development of doctrine within Church History. In this way, we can trace the different groups, persons, controversies, Councils and debates that permeate the pages of Church History, with a view to understanding our theology. Church History in this sense becomes "*Historical Theology*". In this way we will discover that Church History has a meaningful contribution to make towards our understanding of doctrine whilst at the same time enabling our study of history to become more exciting. We will employ this method throughout this course. Against this backcloth we will examine the teachings and beliefs of Church leaders and groups.

7. The area that we shall cover in this session is largely the persecution period. Beginning with the initial persecution under Nero AD 64, we shall proceed to view the Domitian persecution of the late first century, Trajan's persecution early in the second century, the severe persecution under Marcus Aurelius, and then the persecution under Decius in the mid third century and finally the persecution before Constantine, namely Diocletian's attack on the Church in the very early fourth century. The Apostle Peter had written to his church warning the Christians not to be surprised at the "*fiery ordeal that comes upon you....*" ( 1 Peter 4:12). Little did the early Christians realise the literal truth of those words. For the next two and a half centuries, the Church would be under severe attack, and, to use the words of Daniel 11:22, "Those who know their God shall stand firm and take action".

## 1. Time Chart showing six periods of persecution

Emperors and major Events  
AD30 Crucifixion / Resurrection

37-41 Caligula  
41-54 Claudius Jews expelled from Rome  
54-68 Nero Great fire of Rome (64AD)

### **First Persecution**

69 Four Emperors and Civil War  
69-79 Vespasian and AD70 with the Destruction of Jerusalem  
79-81 Titus: Volcano Vesuvius eruption  
81-96 Domitian: John exiled to Patmos cAD 95

### **Second Persecution**

96-98 Nerva : Respite from persecution  
98-117 Trajan:

### **Third Persecution**

117-138 Hadrian  
138-161 Antonius Pius  
161-180 Marcus Aurelius

### **Fourth Persecution**

180-192 Commodus  
193-211 Septimus Severus  
211-235 Later Severan dynasty: Respite from persecution  
235-238 Maximus Thax  
238-244 Gordian III  
244-249 Philip the Arabian  
249-251 Decius

### **Fifth Persecution**

253-260 Valerian  
260-268 Gallienus  
268-270 Claudius Gothicus: Respite from persecution  
270-275 Aurelian  
275-276 Tacitus  
276-282 Probus  
285-305 Diocletian / Maximian

### **Sixth Persecution**

305-311 Constantinus / Galerius  
312-337 Constantine Peace and toleration for the Church

## 2. The Church and State: Initial circumstances

2:1 Within the Roman Empire with its own state religion were the tolerated various religious cults with their enthusiastic devotees. The state cult, at this stage, only required nominal yet, obligatory, acceptance rather than fervent support. Rome regarded the other gods as optional, and this included the worship of Yahweh by the Jews. If a cult proved not to be in the best interests of the Empire, it could be suppressed. Whilst none of the cults actually received official acknowledgement, they could be tolerated.

2:2 The Jews however, were a problem for the Empire. They were monotheists, worshipping only one God and presenting themselves as most exclusive in a pantheistic world where it was prudent to be accepting of all religions even if they did not square with their own. The Jews were offered special privileges, for example they were exempt from various military and civil services, provided they offered sacrifices on behalf of the Emperor, and thus with a little bending of the rules could be found a place within the Empire.

2:3 Then came the Christians! At first they were mistaken for being Jews, and were in fact treated as if they were Jews. Naturally, this was an easy mistake given the fact that at first the Christians continued to worship in the Synagogues and even Paul the apostle began his preaching amongst the Jews. However, the separation between Jews and Christians became even more obvious with the religious leaders of Israel demonstrating openly their opposition to Paul and wanting to use the same Roman legal machinery for his downfall as they had done some thirty years previously in the matter of Jesus.

2:4 The Empire soon found they had on their hands another 'sect' that was proving to be even more exclusive than the Jews and portrayed a total rejection of all other gods, even the state religion itself. "*Sacrifice to Caesar*", it said. But the Christians responded with stubborn refusal. The Empire, in its paranoid condition for self-existence surrounded with enemies beyond its borders longing for its downfall, found itself in a difficult position. The inevitable had to happen. The Empire declared the very name "*Christian*" to mean an enemy of the state. Peter's comment, "*If one does suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God*" (1 Pet 4:16) has a special relevance against this background. Sedition, therefore, must be put down, and those who refused to sacrifice to Caesar when commanded must be dealt with punitively.

## 3. The Early Persecutions

3:1 Emperor Worship was becoming more popular. This had originated in the East where it was common to attribute divine qualities and powers to any ruler, the "*divine right of kings*". The conquering Romans had basked in this flattery, and the emperors were beginning to demand the worship that was so often lavished on them. Thus, loyalty to the state was judged by the standard of devotion to the Emperor as a god. Such a concept, however, was never fully developed until the reign of Domitian towards the end of the first century. Some Emperors ignored the divine adoration whilst others joked about it. On his deathbed, Vespasian said, "*I feel I am becoming a god*". Officially, in the early stages, Caesar was not quite worshipped; one could invoke Caesar's genius (guardian angel). But the oriental practice of ascribing deity to those whom one would flatter was too strong. Soon a perfunctory acceptance of Caesar's deity would be obligatory. Pergamum had the dubious honour to be the first location for the building of the temple in honour of a living emperor. In BC 29 permission had been granted to the citizens of Pergamum to erect and dedicate a temple to Augustus. It is not without significance

that in Revelation 2:12ff within the letter to the Church at Pergamum it was stated, "*I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is: you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith.*" ( vs 13). Is the reference to "*Satan's Throne*", the temple erected in honour to the worship of Augustus?

3:2 In AD 64 there was the great fire of Rome. We do not know for sure why **Nero** decided to use the Christians as scapegoats for taking the blame for the fire, but as he himself was suspected of arson his actions were to divert popular suspicion from himself. The fact that Nero chose to use the Christians rather than another pagan group shows how he could manipulate the general ill will with which these Christians were regarded.

3:3 There were various reasons why the main population despised the Christians. When Christianity separated from the State, it was viewed as an illicit cult having no history or tradition. The Jews on the other hand could claim history and custom. It was felt that Christianity was a facade concealing something dreadful and distasteful to the average man. In the first place they were regarded as '*atheists*' due to their exclusive monotheism and total rejection of all other gods, worshipping no visible god. These Christians also argued against other religions, showing themselves intolerant towards other religions, and exclusive.

They were also seen to be unsociable haters of the human race because they refused to indulge in common habits of ordinary social activity. They kept themselves separate. Stories circulated about their suspected '*cannibalism*' because they spoke of celebration which included the '*eating and drinking of Christ's blood*'. Incest was also claimed for the Christians because of their close love for each other and their accepted terms of "*brother and sister*" when speaking of each other.

The interest which the state police were beginning to show in them made them hold private meetings and these were then mistakenly taken for secret political meetings designed for the overthrow of the Empire. Due to the Christian's emphasis upon holiness within an overt immoral society, they were seen as '*kill-joys*'. Earthquakes, pestilence, floods and fires, were viewed as the responses of angry gods who had been upset and displeased because of the Christians refusal to acknowledge and worship them. The average citizen knew next to nothing of the meaning of Christianity and saw it as a dangerous sect. Thus, whilst Christianity, at this stage, had not actually become a state crime, any repressive measures that the state chose to take against these '*disgusting*' Christians would have full popular approval.

3:4 Nero's handling of the Christians proved to be a precedent for future Emperors who saw fit to impose similar harsh measures against the Christians. The Christians were tortured and burned in Nero's gardens in Rome with a savagery that made even unsympathetic observers, like Tacitus, feel disgust at the Emperor's actions. The persecution was confined to Rome itself and did not, at this stage, reflect any general official policy of Christian persecution.

3:5 The situation became worse under **Emperor Domitian** ( AD 81-96). Except for Caligula and Nero the Emperors had traditionally discouraged over-enthusiastic subjects from offering them divine honours. Domitian took the opposite view, styling himself as "*Master and God*", and inclined to suspect of treachery those who looked askance at his cult. The customary oath '*by the genius of the Emperor*' became officially obligatory. It was during his reign as Emperor (c AD 90) that John was banished to the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9), thus this period sets the scene for the background of the book of Revelation and written around AD 90.

3:6 Domitian's own personal association with Christianity was probably through the action he took towards his own relatives, Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla, who was the Emperor's niece, and other Roman nobles who were convicted of "*atheism with a Jewish colouring*", which was taken to mean Christianity. These and others were suspected of conspiring against him. He never had any children and so was suspicious of any that might be possible successors. Domitian had a great lust for power, and as a great administrator, he was able to master the senate, which made him very unpopular. He exercised a reign of terror.

3:7 Initially **Emperor Trajan** (AD 98-117) tolerated the Christians until he received a letter from Pliny, governor of Bithynia, complaining about suspicious conduct of the Christians and asking what sort of action he should take against them. Pliny was concerned about the need for a public fire brigade but Trajan warned against such organisations that might prove to be dangerous political groups aimed at subversive action. Thus, attention was drawn to Christianity as a similar '*club*', as it was not a recognised religious cult and thus could not justify its meetings on mere religious grounds. At first Pliny was content to just execute a few Christians on the grounds that they refused to renounce their faith, but he later found that there were so many of them he just did not know what to do, so he wrote to the Emperor for advice.

3:8 Part of Pliny's letter asks, "*...whether the very profession of the name is to be punished, or only the criminal practices which go along with the name?*". He goes on, "*So far this has been my procedure when people were charged before with being Christians. I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians; if they said "Yes", I asked them a second and third time, warning them of the penalty; if they persisted I ordered them to be led off to execution*". He continues, "*Some of these denied that they were Christians or had ever been so; at my dictation they invoked the gods and did reverence with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose along with the statues of the gods, they also cursed Christ; and as I am informed that people who are really Christians cannot possibly be made to do any of those things, I considered that the people who did them should be discharged*". Some had recanted and rejected their faith, "*Others..... denied (i.e. that they were Christians); they meant that they had once been Christians but had given it up; some three years previously. All these likewise both did reverence to your image and the statues of the gods and cursed Christ*". Through interrogation the only information that Pliny could glean was that, "*They (the Christians) were in a habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from denying a trust....*". Much of this had been obtained from torturing two female slaves who were "*deacons*". Trajan's reply to Pliny was that he should continue his present method of dealing with Christians and that if they are charged with being Christians should be punished except anyone who denies that they are a Christian and can give proof of this by invoking the gods.

3:9 Under the persecution led by **Emperor Antonius** (138-161) the famous Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna was put to death in 156. A police squad went to arrest the elderly Polycarp, and the captain, wishing to spare this old man unnecessary suffering suggested, "*Why, what harm is there in saying, 'Caesar is Lord', and offering incense and saving yourself?*". Polycarp refused to listen to his plea and went to the arena. Again they tried to persuade Polycarp to give in, "*Have respect for your age, swear by the divinity of Caesar, repent and say, 'Away with the atheists*". The plea was repeated, "*Take the oath, and I will let you go; revile Christ*". Then the old Polycarp made his confession, "*Eighty six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong, how then can I blaspheme my Saviour and King?*" Eventually when they realised that they would never persuade him they began to pile up the wood and so Polycarp was burned at

the stake. It was the death of Polycarp that seems to have produced a sense of revulsion at that time bringing a brief cessation of persecution in Asia. The Emperor Antoninus sent an edict forbidding the persecution of Christians.

3:10 Under **Emperor Marcus Aurelius** a more severe persecution occurred (161-180). He looked upon the Christians as dangerous revolutionaries and as a disintegrating ferment of the life of the state. The Christian's steadfast stand in the face of persecution was not seen by Marcus as a quality to be admired but as perverse obstinacy to be punished. Politically during this period Rome was experiencing troubles from both within and without the empire which made them very sensitive about anything which appeared to diminish the solidarity of the state itself. In the year 166, the population of the empire experienced flood, plague, famine and barbarian invasion from beyond the Danube frontier. It was known as the '*Anus Calamitosus*'. Looking for some scapegoat to blame for the tragedies, the common people did not require much prompting to select the Christians as the cause, given their *atheism*. The worst persecution broke out in 177 affecting the churches in Vienne and Lyons in the Rhone valley. The outbreak of opposition came in the form of mob violence. The Emperor declared that those Christians found to be Roman citizens should be beheaded, and the rest put to death through torture.

3:11 Neither age nor sex were spared. A ninety-year-old bishop of Lyons and a fourteen-year-old boy were among the victims. A slave girl, Blandina, showed, through torture outstanding loyalty to her Lord, her tormentors exhausting themselves in their attempts to make her renounce Christ or admit the evil practices alleged to be rife in Christian meetings, before finally being thrown to a bull. "*I am a Christian*", was her reply, "*And there is no wickedness among us*". In some areas, many attempts were made to persuade the Christians to recant, but in desperation the magistrates had to send them off to execution because of their refusal, or '*incurable obstinacy*' as it was termed. So intense was the people's hatred of Christians, after death their bodies were exhibited in the open air for six days before being burned and the ashes scattered in the river. The attempt was to try and discredit any possible belief in a physical resurrection. The fact is that during the reign of Marcus Aurelius Christian blood flowed more freely through persecution than during the previous half century. Marcus was a Stoic; he felt that people should be able to stand on their own feet. He could not understand the Christian doctrine of the need for grace and Divine salvation. He viewed the Christian practices as immoral and dangerous for the prosperity and development of the empire. In other words, he persecuted the Christians through his philosophy, for what he thought were good reasons, viz., and patriotism. During his reign, there was a systematic attempt to stamp out Christianity completely.

#### 4. A brief respite from persecution

4:1 Under Marcus' son, **Commodus** (180-192), the Christians had an easier time. Many were released from the Sardinian mines, to which they had been condemned during Marcus' reign. But in 202 Septimus Severus put a ban on people becoming either Jews or Christians, and small outbreaks of persecutions were known in the empire, in Egypt, Alexandria and Carthage. In the latter, a mistress and her slave stood hand in hand in the arena showing not only the enduring nature of Christians but also the extent to which Christ had broken down class distinctions amongst Christians.

4:2 Tertullian, a third century writer, apologist, sought to write in defence of the Christians, "*If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise or floods the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises; 'The Christians to the*

lions". However, there followed through the succeeding reigns half a century of peace for the Christians. The later Arabian Emperor Philip (244-249) was even reputed to be almost a Christian.

## 5. The Decian Persecution (249-251)

5:1 As the middle years of the century drew on, two significant enemy forces were plaguing the empire. In the north were the Goths, and on the east the Persians. A disturbing factor for the pagans, during these troubled political times, was the Christian's refusal to serve in the army. They were then regarded as being disloyal to the state. Christians refused to join the army largely because of the idolatrous practices associated with the religious rituals involved with taking the military oath. Equally, pagans did not like hearing the Christians talking cheerfully of the coming end of time with the collapse of civilisation in fire and the future reign of the saints. An additional factor was that it was feared that the Christians of the empire would be siding with the Persians for the Christians in that empire who were experiencing more freedom and toleration than they did under Rome.

5:2 Thus under **Emperor Decius** strict measures were taken to suppress Christianity. He took the view that there should only be one Empire and one religion, thus Christians should not only be punished but that Christianity itself should be crushed completely. The bishops and leaders were attacked with great ferocity, and every effort was made to make the rank and file apostasise. An edict was published in 250 AD to the effect that every one in the empire must sacrifice to the state gods and get a certificate to confirm this. A number of Christians felt unable to endure this form of persecution and so gave in to the demands to sacrifice to the Emperor with very little pressure. Others managed to secure certificates stating that they had performed the ritual when they hadn't. This led to great disorganisation within the Church especially when such '*Christians*', in later times, sought to re-enter the Church fellowship again. It was the aim of Decius to weaken the Church through causing many apostates rather than martyrs, and thus discredit many Christians, bringing a serious division in their ranks. Disputes would later arise within the Church as to how to treat the '*lapsed*' Christians.

5:3 Significantly the persecution was carried out by the officials of the state without the co-operation of the ordinary pagans. The old hatred for the Christians was disappearing together with the old slanders about their practices. They were now generally regarded as decent neighbours, thus, far from co-operating with the police, the pagans often helped the Christians to escape their attention. Decius eventually died in battle, but he had by that time struck a significant blow against the Church.

5:4 Following a few years of peace, during which **Valerian** (253-260) appeared favourable to Christianity, the Emperor changed his mind through panic at the Persian invasion. He published an official edict forbidding Christians to hold their ordinary public meetings, the clergy were to suffer the death penalty; knights degraded from rank; ladies of rank exiled, and employees of the imperial household sent to forced labour camps. The Persians during an eastern campaign took prisoner Valerian in 259.

## 6. A further brief period of respite from persecution 260-303

6:1 **Emperor Gallienus**, realising the need for internal unity, declared the persecution to be at an end. This period of peace extended for the next forty years. Gallienus put out an edict claiming that Christianity was to be regarded as a lawful and legal religion. He realised that previous persecutions had clearly not changed the fortunes of the state. During this time the Christians increased rapidly in number and became a very powerful minority within the empire, especially amongst the middle classes. Diocletian's (future Emperor) wife and daughter were Christians by faith, if not through baptism. However, the old patriotic Roman conservatives still viewed Christianity as an unmitigated evil for the state.

## 7. The Diocletian Persecution

7:1 Almost twenty years of **Diocletian's** (285-305) reign passed before there was any sign of persecution. Trouble on the eastern frontier gave rise to the need for loyalty amongst the population, especially as Armenia, which lay just beyond that border, was officially Christian. Thus, the old state religion in a new form was revised. This time it was characterised by Neo-Platonism philosophy that saw Christianity as a real rival. When the storm broke in 303 AD it was very sudden and intense, and many who had the welfare of the state at heart believed that the time had come to dispose of Christianity completely.

7:2 The first stage of the persecution was the issuing of an edict in 303 ordering the destruction of Church buildings and copies of the scriptures. The hope was that Christianity would become starved of spiritual fellowship and teaching and thus perish naturally. At the same time, a fire had been started in the imperial palace and many were (like Nero in AD 64) blaming the Christians, although there was reason for believing that it had been caused by Galerius to force Diocletian's hand against the Christians. Thus a second edict was issued ordering the arrest of the clergy, and this was swiftly followed by a third insisting that all Christians should offer sacrifices to the state gods on pain of death. Torture was being used again to force Christians to recant. Even Diocletian's Christian wife and daughter were forced to offer sacrifice. Thus, a reign of terror was begun, lasting from 308-310.

7:3 This time, however, following the forty years of peace in which pagan neighbours were able to obtain a more accurate picture of Christianity and recognise them as decent folk, the main populace were unwilling to co-operate with the persecution. The pagans even attempted to protect the Christians and some officials in charge of sacrifices turned a blind eye to refusals to participate. As the people queued up to file past the sacrifice to throw a pinch of incense on it, the officials might easily fail to notice an odd individual who omitted to perform the rite, and if someone tried to be over-zealous and protest verbally, they might, for their own safety, be knocked on the head or hustled along as fast as possible. It has been stated that Diocletian's persecution failed because it *"wrecked the conscience and humanity of heathenism"*. Even the very pagans themselves were being sickened by so much torture.

7:4 The nature of the persecution varied throughout the empire. In Gaul and Britain there was hardly any at all, yet it was fiercer than any previous persecution in Egypt and Palestine. Galerius, son in law to Diocletian and 'junior colleague', continued in power after Diocletian's abdication in 305, and sought to perpetuate the persecution with utmost severity. However, just before his death, Galerius had issued an edict rescinding the anti-Christian legislation. **Maximian**, his colleague and successor, on the other hand attempted a subtle kind of antichristian persecution by issuing his *"Acts of Pilate"* which was made compulsory for all child

education. The *'Acts of Pilate'* was a propaganda attempt to bring Christianity into discredit by describing the origins of Christianity in an unsavoury guise. It was instantly recognised to be clumsy forgeries of so-called scriptures as it placed Pilate's reign in the wrong era. He also issued pamphlets full of slander about Christ. This gave a more subtle theological slant to the persecution.

7:5 The following year, 312, **Constantine** had established his supremacy in the west by his victory at the Milvian Bridge just outside Rome where he defeated and killed Maximian. Constantine himself became a convert to Christianity following his victory which he saw as a divine blessing from the Christian's God. Thus he instantly restored all Church property and eventually agreed on a policy of complete toleration for all religions throughout the entire empire. The way was now open for all exiled Christians to return. Property was returned and demolished Church buildings reconstructed.

## 8. Conclusion

Whilst the last battle between the Church and the State had been the most ferocious, it ended with Christianity becoming the victor. For almost two hundred and fifty years the Church had been at variance with the state, and the former suffering severely. Systematic persecution, some of it with and some without the backing of state policy, had attempted to crush and destroy the Church body and soul, but without success. Gradually over the years the Christians won the respect and admiration of their pagan neighbours who, instead of supporting the persecution, had in fact become their protectors. Endurance, tenacity and total commitment to the faith by individual Christians eventually achieved for the Church complete state recognition and acceptance.

Although it is gratifying to learn of the end to persecution at the commencement of the fourth century, a new and more ingenious sophisticated attack on the Church would now commence through doctrinal heresy with divisive and devastating results. Internal strife would prove to be more damaging and the inclusion of serious deviations in orthodoxy leading to the growth of the Roman Catholic system throughout the Middle Ages would be more destructive in the long term. Church and State would now become locked into a constant battle in which the former, in later years, would come to dictate to the latter. A strange reversal of affairs.

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