

II.2.b.
Church and
State

Church and State Relationships

From its earliest beginnings, the church was illegal in the Roman Empire. Christianity was not a permitted religious expression. This status grew largely from the following reasons:

1) New faiths were not permitted and there was a resentment in the Hebrew world which would not allow Christianity to be accepted as a Jewish "spin-off." All ancient religions could be accepted in the polytheistic economy of Rome...new ones were seen as innovations and were not welcome.

2) Distrust of secretism as it was seen in the church particularly with regard to the sacred acts of the Lord's supper, etc. The church gave the appearance of a closeted community.

3) Societal judgments...the moral voice of the church challenged lives and standards in a world where such challenges were not welcome.

4) Denial of Emperor Deification and the surrounding rituals in which Christians would not indulge gave a "non-patriotic" view of the body. The Emperors expected to be in the pantheon and wanted pantheonic worship while they lived.

Other reasons are given historically and you may find the little work of Minusius Felix, THE OCTAVIAN, to be of interest as in it he summarizes in debate form the factors in the church that made it unpopular with Rome. The date is the last half of the second century, BC.

It is noteworthy, however, that the illegal status did not develop from any of these:

1) Breaches of morality...or lack of public interest in conduct. The church stood sharply for this and was a purifying area in public life. There were some charges on these lines through a misunderstanding of the "love feast", etc. but any proved incidents were not given.

2) Revolution or criminal incitement were never found on the part of the church. Nero apparently blamed the church for the fire that destroyed Rome, a false accusation, but the church is actually free from any such disruptive activity.