

the seriousness of their error. How to regard them or bring them back to fellowship would be a major problem.

In the Second place...some found ways of escaping persecution without actually making formal recantation. When one recanted and sacrificed to the gods, one was given a paper called a libellus that showed further inquisitors that the party in question was really a pagan in practice. Some found methods to bribe officials into giving them these papers for a price without a formal submission (and the Empire did not discourage this). They carried a libellus for protection while not actually sacrificing to the gods. These people are called libelli (the letter carriers) and if you do not think this presented a problem later, you have forgotten your understanding of human nature.

On the Third side, in their quest to destroy the church, the Romans sought to destroy the Scripture. When someone gave Scripture to the Romans for destruction (on demand and threat of torture), that party was called a traditor (one who handed it over).

Fourth, a great company of martyrs and witnesses developed and these took on extreme attitudes regarding the persons in the first three of these categories. The attitude was not uniform but it was severe and the question of how to handle defectors would rankle the church in both the Novatian and Donatist schisms to be discussed at a later point in the materials.

Many Christians simply fled the persecutors and hid themselves in remote places. But a great number died and a greater number were scarred for life in cruel ways. So effective was the persecution that the leadership of the church was decimated severely and in the years following Trajan's persecution strong leadership is rare. Between those who were killed outright, those who compromised truth and lost credibility, and those who were ruined by torture so as to be of less use to the fellowship, a great part of the church was damaged.

III.1.c.
Empire
Division

The Division of the Empire

I have already discussed this, briefly, on page 51 and the chart on page 50 carries the main ideas. It need not be discussed further save to say that the idea will confuse Roman politics until Rome falls.