

## Document Packet: "Early Christianity"

### Document #1

*Seeing the crowds, he (Jesus) went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.

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."

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.

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.

**SOURCE:** Matt. 5:1-17, 21:22, 38-48; 6:1, 14, 15, Standard Version of the Bible, 1952.

## Document #2

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 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.

### The Correspondence Between Pliny and Trajan ( Pliny was governor of Bithynia)

#### 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 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 persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that . . . inflexible obstinacy 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 incense, to your image, together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ, none of which acts, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing. . . 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. Information without the accuser's name attached must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent(example) and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.

**SOURCE:** Pliny, *Letters*, translated by Wilham Melmoth, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Vol.11, pp. 401-05, 407. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library".

### Document #3

There were those (Christians) arrested since the governor had publicly commanded that we should all be prosecuted... The soldiers... 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...Then at last the holy martyrs endured sufferings beyond all description ...and all the fury of the mob and of the governor and of the soldiers was raised beyond measure against all Christians.

Christians Maturus and Sanctus and Blandina and Attalus were led forth to fight the wild beasts in public, and to a common exhibition of the inhumanity , 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 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...Their persecutors did not stop even here, but went on growing more and more furious, wishing to conquer their endurance, yet gained nothing from Sanctus beyond the sound of the confession which he had been accustomed to make from the beginning.

Thus 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 variations 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 every day to see the torture of the others, and efforts were made to force her to swear by the idols, and the mob was furious against her because she had remained steadfast and disregarded them, so that there was nor pity for or respect for the sex of the woman. They exposed her to all the terrors and put her through every torture in turn. And scourging, after the beasts, 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 (non-believers of Christ) themselves confessed that never before among them had a woman suffered so much and so long.

**SOURCE:** Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, translated by Kirsopp Lake, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Vol. I, pp.41 30-33.