Chapter 3. The Effects of Roman Rule on Christianity[301]

The setting demands the understanding of Roman rule, as the society at question seemed to be functioning within this paradigm. In fact, as we shall discover in this chapter, it seems that many of the Roman practices contributed to persecution in the first place. Peter also employed many of the concepts of Roman rule in his proposed solution: the reversal of roles.

It is rather important to note that this discussion on the effects of Roman rule on Christianity does discuss Rome and their systems pretty generally.[302] It is noted that exceptions did exist.

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[301] Many of the systems in place and views toward the emperor seems to be rather absolute. In theory they probably were. In practice, however, things might have been more mellow. This dissertation provides the information as understood by many scholars mentioned in this section. As such, it might seem to be absolute, but it is acknowledged here at the start of this chapter that most things are not as absolute and clearly defined as in theory. Read the two volumes of Trombley on "Hellenic Religion and Christianization" (1993). Also see the work of Rose (1959); Ferguson (1977).

[302] It needs to be noted that it is not the purpose of this dissertation to study the Roman system of government in depth. An overview is supplied to help the reader understand:

a. How the Roman system of government contributed to the problems of Christians.
b. How society at large functioned within this system.
c. How Peter used and defended Christians against this system (which will be discussed later in the dissertation).

It is fully acknowledged that Roman practice differed from place to place and governor to governor.

For this discussion lines are being drawn so that Peter's advice and arguments could be applied to probabilities and / or possibilities. It is not the aim of this dissertation to study the Roman system in detail but rather Peter's response thereto. General lines are supplied to abet the reader to better understand what Peter said and why. Furthermore, these generalities are used to help sketch the problem and the magnitude thereof that Peter's readers faced.

3.1 Understanding the Roman System of Government[303]

Roman city rule mostly followed a hierarchical system of government. The final authority was vested in the people (ὁ δῆμος).[304] The δῆμος exercised their authority, including legislative, elective and judicial functions in the assembly (ἡ ἐκκλησία). Furthermore, there was a large body of citizens called the council (ἡ βουλή).[305] The council's responsibility consisted of the submitting of proposals to the assembly and the supervision of public officials, the city's finances and the public buildings. But their function was broader than just the above in the sense that they could confer honours (including citizenship) upon residents or aliens and they also acquired the honour of receiving foreign envoys. Lastly, the actual administration of the cities was entrusted to a number of committees.[306] Thus we find the following system of government:

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[303] *The Roman system of government is well explained in the following works Levick (1985); Millar (1977); Saller (1982); Weaver (1967).*

[304] *Although this is so,* ὁ δῆμος *was defined in a very limiting way to refer to only the enrolled, adult and male population. It would appear as if this was theoretically true although things worked slightly differently in practice.*

[305] *Jones (1940:164,165) suggests that* ἡ βουλή *normally numbered in the region of five hundred members.*

[306] *Magie (1950:57,58).*

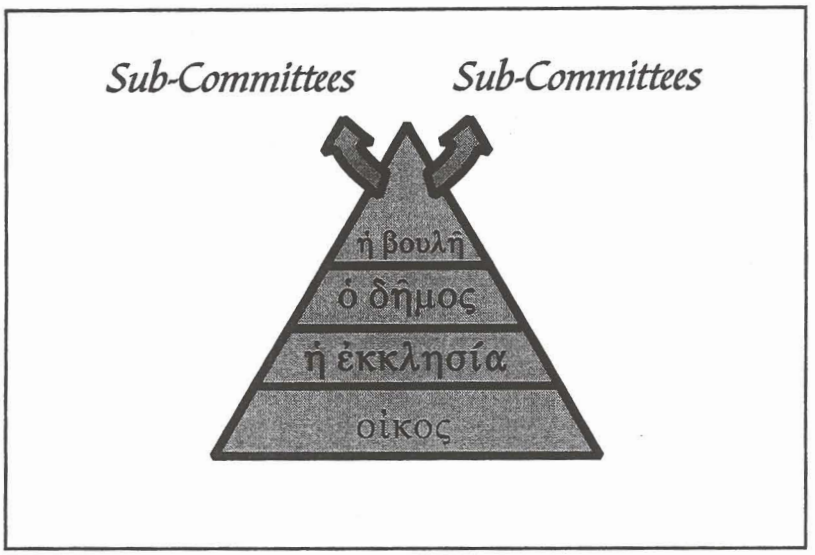

Figure 1

That system of government formed a pyramid as can be seen in figure one. Most people were at the bottom of the pyramid. The building blocks of this government were the households.[307] *When the households got together they formed an assembly. And so each higher level of government had fewer participants. The top group formed sub-committees to rule.*

The result of this system appeared to be that the wealthy came to have a virtual monopoly on public office.[308] *The councils became more powerful by assuming the right to veto legislation enacted by the assembly. The council controlled the election of magistrates and all other important matters of the city. Consequently, the cities were governed by a few rich people.*

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[307] *There is a whole section on the role of the family and the home within basic religion and the Roman system of government (Ferguson 1977:10-13).*

[308] *The rich and powerful were so powerful that by Cicero's time the members of the council became life-members automatically unless they were expelled for really gross misconduct (Cicero, Pro Flacco:42). Thus, from being a committee of the assembly which was to be renewed at frequent intervals, they became a permanent committee with power over the assembly.*

It could therefore be understood that, if Christianity angered the right people (and they did not have to be many) there would be trouble for Christians on a big scale. The power of the Roman governor to exercise his discretion in matters which came before him, for example, was near absolute. Vested in him was both the civil and military authority. He was also the supreme judge and he largely interfered in the financial matters.[309] *There were certain exceptions where special cities*[310] *had special rights which the governor was bound to respect as long as they behaved properly. Contrasting this great power there was the non-existent power of the masses. It is written that:*

> *"... there is no succour for the oppressed, no facility for protest, no senate, no popular assembly".*[311]

3.2 *Understanding the Functioning of Roman Society*[312]

Roman society was famous for its laws. Everything was governed by the implementation of these laws. Society was legally stratified according to a hierarchy of ranks or orders such as: senators, equestrians, decurions, free-born persons, slave-born persons and slaves. The primary

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[309] *Although matters of finance were the special business of the quaestor, the governor still interfered. For further discussion on the Roman system of government see Arnold (1906:54) and Stevenson (1939:72).*

[310] *Cities with special rights were the foederatae civitates and the liberae civitates. For information regarding these civitates see Warden (1986:69).*

[311] *Cicero (The Letters to His Brother Quintus: 1.1.22).*

[312] *For study material on the functioning of Roman society see the works of Cadoux (1955); Carcopino (1977).*

ingredient of this rank or order was birth and/or wealth.[313] *The constitution of citizenship was determined by the person's rank. All senators, equestrians, most of the decurions and many free persons were legally recognized as citizens.*[314] *Social status, however, was something totally different since social status, unlike rank, was a matter not of the law, but of the social estimation of a person's prestige based on custom and convention.*[315] *Thus, status was more a cultural concern, and rank more a legal matter.*

3.3 The Negative Effect of Roman Rule on Christianity and its Identity[316]

Logic alone is enough to lead one to the realization that the majority of the general population was frustrated and discontented with Roman rule. It also seems obvious that the discontented populace was not very popular with the government. This is well illustrated in Rome's reaction to public disorder, revolts, etc.[317] *If Christians came into disfavour with the Roman authorities*

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[313] *Bechtler (1996:125).*

[314] *Garsey and Saller (1987:112-118). Furthermore, the numbers of these classes / ranks where limited, especially in the top ranks where only about six hundred persons were senators (In the first three centuries AD.). The number of decurions was much larger. In general terms the decurions were the top one hundred males of each city. For further discussion on the composition of Roman society as well as figures relating to such composition see Hopkins (1974:103).*

[315] *Garnsey and Saller (1987:109-125); MacMullen (1974:88-94); Meeks (1983:53-55).*

[316] *To consult more work on the relationship between Rome and Christianity see Cunningham (1982); Whittaker (1984); Aland (1968).*

[317] *The Emperor was very powerful and ruled with an iron fist. To make examples of people he punished them severely if they opposed him. The same can be said for his*

for some reason or the other, that too would lead to consequences which would have a negative effect on Christians and their identity.

3.3.1 Problem One: Christianity a Solace for Lower Society

The Christian message might have contained a positive appeal to elements of the lower society at large. Greek citizens who were removed from access to any significant decision making in their own πόλις could well find significant involvement in world developments in the Christian church since God himself is the Ruler thereof. The populace would have loved the Christian belief that the Roman state stood under God's judgement. If we take this belief one step further it places subjection to the state in a secondary position because the Christian was ruled by God primarily in contrast to the Emperor. Therefore, the Christian would submit to the state only in so far as the state acted within prescribed limits which God had imposed on it.[318] *If this were the case, one would expect that the Christian message might not have been popular with Roman rule either. Since Rome judged the general society with suspicion and to be disruptive of the social order they then had additional reason to suppress the church.*

Christianity had many appealing elements to the commoners. Certainly not the least of these was the distinctly political appeal of the Christian message especially to those who bore ill will

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treatment of the people and groups within such cities. New groups (especially religious groups) were not tolerated as they were perceived to be destabilizing the community. On the other hand, the Emperor viewed established religious groups as stabilizing to the community. The Christian church being a new group was disapproved of.

[318] *For a more complete study of the topic on state and church or state and God see Cullmann (1956:59).*

toward the Roman state. This could be seen in 5:6-11[319] where God helped those who suffered. In verses six and seven the believers were urged to humble themselves before God and to cast their cares upon Him. In contrast to God's care and in the context of cares and anxiety the διάβολος was introduced. It is possible to see in verse 8-9 hints that the reason Christians were able to resist the devil (which appears only to be mentioned here in the whole book) was because God opposed him and his accomplices.[320] If the readers of first Peter interpreted the devil's accomplices (those who cause suffering 5:9) to be Rome it would set up a stage where God was in opposition to Rome. Since we deduced that the readers were in opposition to Rome themselves this would side God with them. The next verse discusses the suffering of the brotherhood in the world. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is a relationship between the brotherhood-wide suffering and the adversary. There seems to be a definite link between the adversary and suffering. Hence, it seems that God is portrayed in opposition to the one that causes the suffering.[321] The Greek text follows:[322]

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[319] It appears as if Peter was quoting Prov. 3:34 (LXX) in 5:5b. During the rest of this section (5:6-11) Peter commented on the text he had just referred to. There was also a similar use of Prov. 3:34 in James 4:6b-10.

[320] Michaels (1988:294).

[321] One cannot help but ask the question whether the author intends the devouring adversary to be understood as an ill-defined general societal resistance to Christianity? Seemingly it appears that early Christians came to picture the devil as an ally of Rome, see Rev. 12 and 13.

[322] The numbered boxes in the Greek text refer to the structure of the following figure which is numbered accordingly to show the structure in the text as well, rather than just in the next diagram.

First Peter 5:6-11

6: Ταπεινώθητε οὖν ὑπὸ τὴν κραταιὰν χεῖρα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ὑψώσῃ ἐν καιρῷ,

7: πᾶσαν τὴν μέριμναν ὑμῶν ἐπιρίψαντες ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν, ὅτι αὐτῷ μέλει περὶ ὑμῶν.

8: Νήψατε, γρηγορήσατε. ὁ ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος ὡς λέων ὠρυόμενος περιπατεῖ ζητῶν *[τινα]* καταπιεῖν·

9: ᾧ ἀντίστητε στερεοὶ τῇ πίστει εἰδότες τὰ αὐτὰ τῶν παθημάτων τῇ ἐν *[τῷ]* κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι ἐπιτελεῖσθαι.

10: Ὁ δὲ θεὸς πάσης χάριτος, ὁ καλέσας ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ δόξαν ἐν Χριστῷ *[Ἰησοῦ]*, ὀλίγον παθόντας αὐτὸς καταρτίσει, στηρίξει, σθενώσει, θεμελιώσει.

11: αὐτῷ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

Figure 2

Consequently, the following contrast and link arise from the structure of 5:6-11:

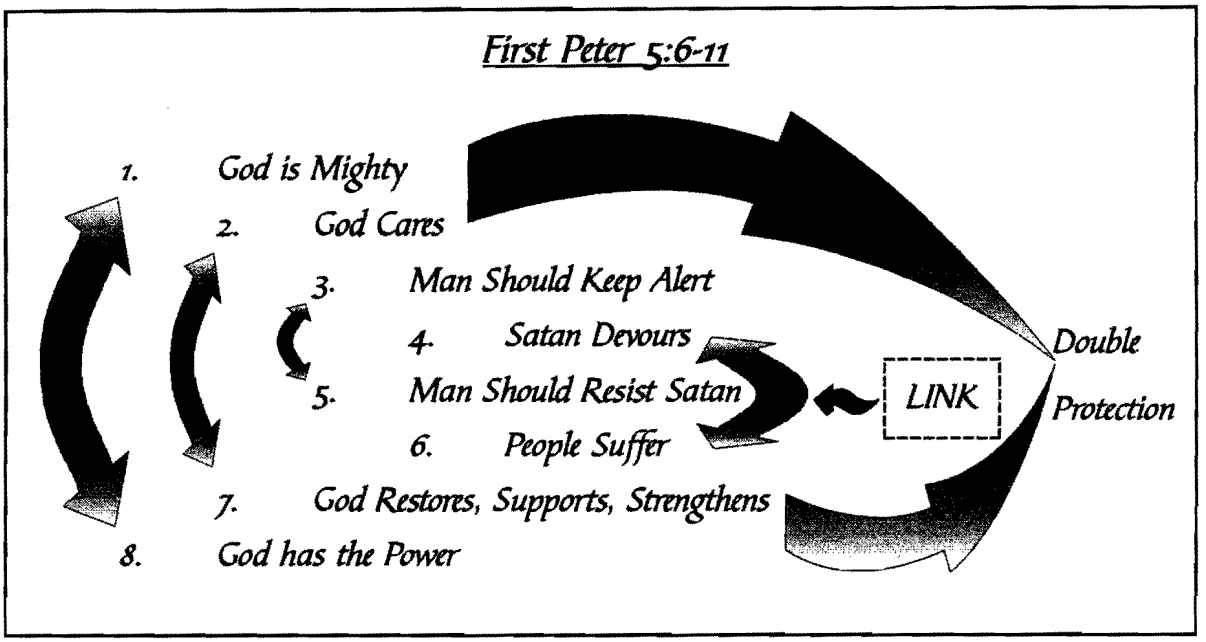

Figure 3

In figure three the struggle between man and Satan (the deduction could possibly be made that Satan would include Rome and general society, although that does make it rather general in nature) is enveloped with God's double protection. A link is also formed between Satan who devours and the people's suffering, hence the link could be extended to those who cause the people to suffer. This leads to the conclusion that the concept of Satan would appear to include Rome and hostile society. This textual structure also appears to make it clear on who's side God is, namely, Peter's audience.

Verse six calls for submission to God's care and protection. It virtually asks the readers to allow God to care for them and to protect them. Verses six and seven are not strictly imperatival.[323] *Yet, when Peter tells his audience to be awake in verse eight (or pay attention) he uses the imperative. This strong imperative serves as a call to prepare their minds for an encounter with the devil. This verse is reminiscent of, and recalls 1:13 and 4:7. Everywhere in first Peter he seems to be using the plural in reference to the Christians' opposition (for*

[323] *Michaels (1988:296).*

example, Gentiles 2:12, disobedient 2:7-8; 4:17, foolish 2:15, cruel masters 2:18, unbelieving husbands 3:1, blasphemers 4:4b, etc). Here he personifies the adversary in the singular as the devil. When the word διάβολος *appears in the New Testament as a noun*[324] *it appears to be consistently referring to Satan. Satan being portrayed as a roaring lion in this simile, exposes his active involvement in their adverse circumstances. This can be seen in the absolute use of the verb* περιπατεῖν. *The verb* καταπιεῖν, *"swallow" conveys the notion of death. Even this thought might have been appealing to the commoners since Peter assumed that physical death held no fear because they would once again "live before God in the Spirit (4:6; 1:3, 21). Peter removed their fear of death and thereby stripped the devil and his cohorts of their stranglehold (death) over them. This thought in effect took away the power of the devilish coalition and handed that power over to them. To an oppressed and power-starved group like Christians, that must have been very appealing.*

Verse nine starts with the reflection of resistance which is in itself an attractive notion. However, ἀντίστητε *is interpreted by the phrase* στερεοὶ τῇ πίστει. *Therefore the resistance mentioned here did not include hostile endeavours but rather believing and trusting God. Standing firm in the faith is also viewed as imperative since the imperative of* ἀντίστητε *could also have a bearing on the adjective* στερεοὶ. *The reference to the "brotherhood throughout the world" (Revised Standard Version) affirmed their solidarity with Christians everywhere. The feeling of belonging and "we are in the same boat" could also be appealing to the readers who had experienced rejection rather than belonging.*

The phrase "will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" of verse ten appears in the future indicative. This phrase links up with verse six which states that "he will lift you up" (5:6). This can be deduced because verse ten has the effect of reinforcing the aorist subjunctive

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[324] *When* διάβολος *appears as an adjective it bears other meanings such as slanderous, as can be seen in first Tim. 3:11; Tit. 2:3.*

ὑψώσῃ *of verse six. This promise was also inviting to the commoners since they had been pushed down from honour to shame by society. A second reason why this phrase was inviting to commoners is that it promised Someone else (God) who would help them and support them. The reason why they could have faith in or trust God to do so, was because He had the power (5:11). This verse reflects the notion of God's mighty hand of 5:6. The purpose of this verse (5:11), so eloquently described, "is to guarantee still further the certainty of the deliverance promised in vv6 and 10".*[325] *In short Peter promised vindication via God.*

In 5:13 Peter seems to link Rome to Babylon.[326] *But there is a possibility that Satan is also somehow linked to Babylon. It therefore seems reasonable to deduce that Rome is linked to Satan.*[327] *The readers are greeted from the church in Babylon. From the introductory study in the first chapter of this dissertation the conclusion was reached that it seemed as though Peter was writing the epistle from Rome. It therefore appears as if Babylon is a cryptogram for Rome.*[328] *In this indirect way Rome also becomes responsible for the suffering. Since Satan*

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[325] *Michaels (1988:304).*

[326] *As mentioned in a previous footnote, Babylon is almost unanimously interpreted as Rome by twentieth century scholars. Statements confirming this can be found in Goppelt (1978:65-66); Brox (1979:41-43); Filson (1955:403); Fischer (1978:207); and Moule (1956:8-9). For a discussion on some other possibilities see Davids (1990:202) although he also agrees that the only viable option is Rome.*

[327] *The old mathematical equation will suffice to support the conclusion. If A equals B and B equals C then A also equals C.*

[328] *The connection between Babylon and Rome has been discussed at length in the introductory chapter. For this reason it is not going to be debated again. It will suffice to say that most modern interpreters accept this connection. Examples of this acceptance has been rendered in the mentioned chapter.*

stands in opposition to God logic determines that Rome would then also stand in opposition to God. In choosing Christianity it undeniably makes a political statement against Rome (as seen from Rome's perspective). If God instructs man to resist the devil (which seems to also include Rome as we have discussed above) then it implies that God is also resisting the devil and by inference, Rome. The end result is that Rome (by assumption) will stand under the judgement of God (4:17). The following diagrams should be sufficient to illustrate this conclusion:

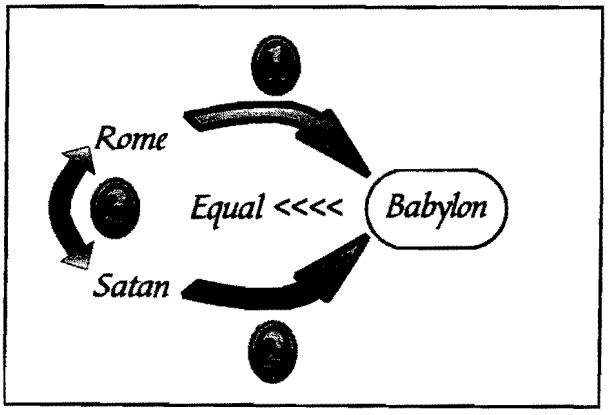

Figure 4

Figure four starts with the inference that Rome is equated to Babylon (5:13).[329] *Secondly, Satan also seems to be equated to Babylon (at least by executing the same actions - suffering) as has been discussed above. If this were the case then we would be presented by the scenario of Rome equalling Satan.*

AND

[329] *Arguments and references to scholars who support this possibility is presented elsewhere in this dissertation.*

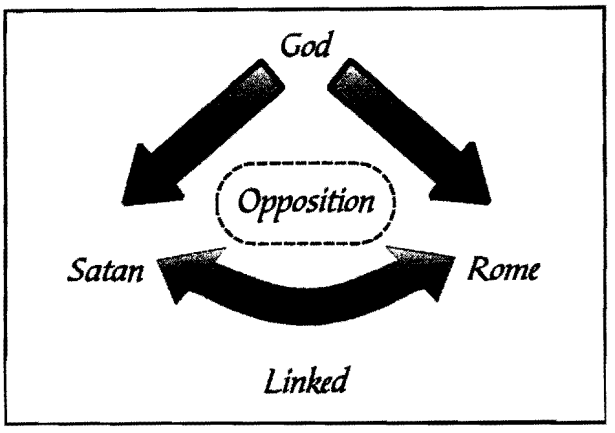

Figure 5

If it were true that Satan and Rome were linked as indicated in figure four, then God would stand in opposition to both Satan and Rome, as seen in figure five. It seems as though we cannot deny that Rome equals Babylon when direct allusions to Rome or the type of power the city represented are made. There seems to be little doubt that Peter viewed Rome as an enemy of the church. Therefore, one can reach the conclusion that Peter also saw Rome as an enemy of God. This view would create two camps, viz. God and Christians in one camp opposing Satan, and Rome and hostile society in the other camp. Different camps would probably have been interpreted by Rome as disorder. This thought would probably have been well received by the general populace especially since they experienced a definite us (the poor) and them (the rich) camps in any event.

3.3.2 Problem Two: The Christian's Acknowledgement of a Higher Power than the Emperor[330]

Appeals to a power higher than Rome and higher than Roman gods inevitably would result in defiance of Rome. The Christian belief was in direct contrast to the Roman belief that the

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[330] *For further information on the perception of the divinity of the Roman Emperor see Taylor (1931).*

Caesar was to be lord, saviour and benefactor of Roman subjects. It is suggested that Octavian (who lived before the time period of our concern) was the absolute ruler. It is interesting to note that the poet Ovid connected the term Augustus with the sacred language of worship.[331] *If Christians did not salute the Emperor in the proper way is seems to be connected with refusal to worship.*[332] *This Roman belief was firmly rooted in the presupposition that the Caesar had control and authority over his subjects, hence they were called subjects. The Romans perceived as a threat any religion or person who denied these titles to Caesar and gave them freely to another person or god / God.*[333]

Although words like σωτήρ *and* κύριος *were not exclusively reserved for the Roman Emperor, loyal Roman subjects would certainly not refuse them to him.*[334] *Most commonly the Emperor was called* κύριος *and* θεὸς. *The understanding that Christians denied these*

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[331] *Fasti, i. 609, "Sancta vocant augusta patres".*

[332] *Frend (1982:4-6). Also see the part of Newsome's book which deals with "worship of the Emperor" (1992:274-276). Ferguson motivates the importance of ruler-worship (1977:29).*

[333] *For examples of such perceptions by the people loyal (even if they are not loyal to Caesar they still use this perception to suit their wants) to Caesar see John 19:12 where the charge is brought bo Pilate that "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar"; and Acts 17:7 "They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus". The results of such sayings and / or actions are: Acts 17:8 "When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil". The texts quoted here are from the New International Version.*

[334] *To learn more about the use of* σωτήρ *and* κύριος *see Foerster and Fohrer (1971:1010); Taylor (1931:58) (which deals with the development of the imperial cult under Julius and Augustus Caesar).*

salutations to the Emperor meant disloyalty in the eyes of the government and loyal Roman subjects. They inferred disloyalty in the eyes of the Emperor and it reflected negatively on the city as a whole.[335] *The city then had to rid themselves of such disloyal members to prove their loyalty to the Emperor. Hence, we find that society denounced Christianity in the strongest possible sense as Christians represented a security threat. Thus, even societal actions were politically motivated. Furthermore, their free use of these words for Jesus, as can be seen in a text like John 20:28, could not have helped the situation, especially if one takes into account that Jesus was crucified by the Romans. For all of the above reasons Christians were perceived by many from the beginning as a people who should, at the very least be watched, because they were considered to be a threat and a danger.*

3.3.3 Problem Three: The Christian's View that all Things are Coming to an End

Another conviction of Christians was that the end of the age was coming soon (4:7). This conviction had a far reaching influence as it had a profound effect on their perception of their obligations to society.[336] *Christians envisioned an imminent end.*[337] *Concern for the poor by Christians could also have been interpreted by government as a threat to the existing social order. In fact, the Jews might have shared this feeling with the government.*[338] *It is*

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[335] *Worship of the rules was not only a Roman practice but also that of the Greeks. Hence, they did not have any objections to worshipping the Roman Emperor. The Christians' refusal to do so was thus seen as resistance to the will of the state. The logic for that conclusion was that, if other nations like the Greeks had no objection, why should Christians? All of these suggestions in this footnote are supported by Newsome (1992:31).*

[336] *Warden (1986:85).*

[337] *Judge (1960:8).*

[338] *It was a Jewish belief that poverty, abnormalities and diseases were the results of*

summarised as follows:

> *"We conclude that for the politically minded Greeks and for the poor[339] of Asia the message of the church had political significance".[340]*

The church's eschatological expectation[341] seems to be well evidenced in 4:7 "The end of all things is near" (New Revised Standard Version). "All things" would include all things and thus would encompass Rome and suffering. Rome would not have taken statements of that nature lightly. But there was worse to come since Christians not only believed that all things (eschatological events) were near but that, when Christ returns, the world (including Rome, and specifically Rome) would stand in God's judgement. The Christian's mind was clear as to the eschatological judgement in as much as they believed that those who abused the faithful "will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead"

God's punishment due to sin and wrongdoing. If a person helped people with abnormalities they were perceived to be acting against God.

[339] There seems to be little said of persecution of the poor during the time of antiquity. It appears as if the poor were left to their own fate in Greek-Roman societies. Their smaller social groups took care of them, baring which they had to beg, steel, etc.

[340] Warden (1986:86).

[341] The church's eschatological expectation is cited as one of the problems as far as the view of society was concerned. Whether or not the church had in fact such an eschatological expectation is not under debate here since it will be discussed later under section 7.2.1 of this dissertation. However, the following books can be cited which deal with the eschatological expectation and views of the early church: Daley (1991); Jackson (1913). Topics of interest to this dissertation covered in this book include amongst others: visions of a new day and eschatology and the apologists. Also see Gloer (1988).

(4:5)(New Revised Standard Version). This judgement was already pre-empted with a negative outcome for the antagonists, contrasting the outcome of the Christian with that of the non-believers at the trial in 4:17.

The Christian's eschatological orientation also caused a detachment from community responsibility. The Christian's affirmation that another King who reigned at God's right hand was coming forthrightly to judge the world and to destroy it, provided additional reason for those in responsible positions of government to see them as a threat, perhaps even as treasonable.[342] *Peter depicts a balance between adherence to the state, and faithfulness to God, as the believer is to submit* πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, *to Emperor and governor (2:13,14). However, there seems to be little doubt that the readers would not have taken this as an uncontested acceptance of the power of pagan Rome. The author confirms this in reference to Rome in 5:13 in what appears to be unmistakable clear language which all seemed to have understood,* Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς ἡ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι.

It might be added that the converse is also true in as much as the government also saw political overtones in the Christian message. What else were they supposed to think when a group proclaims that the empire is to come to an end? This might have cause a huge problem in the eyes of the government and could even be interpreted as an eminent coup of some sort. There seems to be little doubt that Rome would have acted harshly on such a group.

3.3.4 Problem Four: Christian Contact with Rome Seems to be Mostly Negative

It is rather remarkable how often negative contact between Paul and the governments of various cities form an important part of the narrative of Acts. At Antioch of Pisidia (Acts

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[342] *Tertullian makes several allusions to Christians being accused of treason. To view such allusions see de Ste. Croix (1963:17).*

13:14) the Jews "incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up διωγμὸν *(persecution) against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region" (Acts 13:50)(New Revised Standard Version). Both Gentiles and Jews were ready "with their* ἄρχουσιν *(rulers)" (New Revised Standard Version) to stone him at Iconium (Acts 14:5). Paul and Silas were brought before* στρατηγοῖς *(generals / governors) "magistrates" at Philippi (Acts 16:20). At Thessalonica Jason and others were dragged "before the city* πάρχας *(authorities)" (New Revised Standard Version) (Acts 17:6). On yet another occasion Paul was brought before the tribunal and Gallio the* ἀνθυπάτου *(proconsul) of Achaia (Acts 18:12,13). At Ephesus it is the* γραμματεὺς *"town clerk" who quiets the mob (Acts 19:35).*

The point of this discussion is that the authorities were cognizant of Christianity from its very first entrance into their cities. Their consciousness about Christianity was always juxtaposed with negativity as is contended below:

a. *The circumstances under which they became aware of Christianity were consistently of such a nature as to cause them to look upon Christians as the cause of commotion.*
b. *It was in the context of trouble making and popular unrest that the Empire was Paul's protector (at Caesarea).*
c. *Christian missionary activity was surrounded with disorder.*[343] *Such disorder was rather significant in the eyes of Rome since any disorder represented a threat to the established political order.*
d. *Any disturbances in any city was perceived as a challenge to the Roman order. Benko writes that the Roman's view of Christianity was one that "polluted Roman life and that they attacked the very fibre of society like a debilitating disease. ... that Christianity was a disruptive social phenomenon and a danger to the security of the*

[343] *Warden (1986:92).*

state" (1984:21).

e. *Based on the disruptive influence of Christianity alone the authorities would have felt justified in suppressing Christianity. Benko further writes that according to the Romans "Christians deserved their punishment" (1984:21).*

3.3.5 *Problem Five: The Perception of Christians as Radicals*

There are scholars who take the above mentioned point even further. Such scholars are well represented in the argument of those who believe that the Christian communities contained what is termed "a considerable element of revolutionary radicalism".[344] *This postulation is supported with the following four arguments:*

a. *There seemed to have been some prejudice amongst Christians against the state. This could be illustrated with the terminology used for the state, for example:*
   - a1. *The state was called non-Christian (with a negative connotation).*
   - a2. *The state was referred to as "the unrighteous" (first Cor. 6:1).*
   - a3. *We find statements like: "... the whole world lies in sin" (John 16:8; Gal. 3:22).*
   - a4. *The view that the rulers were doomed to perish (first Cor. 2:6-8).*
   - a5. *The rulers were against God (Acts 4:25,26) and by implication God was against the rulers.*
   - a6. *The government was against Jesus (Mark 13:9).*

b. *The Jewish section of the church influenced the church to share the Jewish hostility toward Roman domination.*

c. *A large contingent of the church was attracted from socially and economically depressed elements of society. As such they did not stand to lose much by being hostile to Rome. It was also expected that they were the ones who were more susceptible to be hostile to*

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[344] *Cadoux (1925:98,99). His work also cites many others who hold the same view.*

Rome.

d. *Under the above mentioned circumstances the Christian doctrine of freedom might well have been misconstrued to mean a refusal to submit to ordinary social obligation. Peter's allusion to urge Christians to be conscious of appearances before the Gentiles might stem from the possibility that they had been failing to live up to their social responsibilities (2:16).*[345]

3.3.6 Problem Six: The Similarity Between Christians and Other Mostly Unpopular Groups[346]

As far as outsiders to Christianity was concerned they viewed Christianity as just another mystery-religion.[347] *Factors which led them to such a view could include such similarities between Christianity and other mystery religions as:*

a. *The existence of a saviour-God.*
b. *The proclamation of the importance of transforming behaviour.*
c. *Distinguishing between the current and the next world.*
d. *Offerring hope for the next world.*[348]

However small these supposed similarities might have been, the fact remains that the pagans identified Christians together with other groups (most of which were unpopular) which made

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[345] *Cadoux (1925:98,99).*

[346] *A scholarly work on this topic that will be well worth reviewing is Frend (1976). Also read Turcan (1996).*

[347] *Ferguson (1977:72).*

[348] *Warden (1986:92-121).*

them unpopular too. Examples of such groups were:

a. *Resident Jews.*
b. *Travelling teacher-philosophers.*
c. *Magical practitioners and their followers.*[349]
d. *Greek city cults (not unpopular).*
e. *The Emperor cult (not unpopular).*
f. *Hellenistic mysteries.*

The similarity between Christians and the above mentioned groups are discussed in the following section.

3.3.6.1 The Similarity Between Christians and Resident Jews

There seems to be a host of evidence to support the presence of Jewish communities in Asia Minor. Firstly, there is evidence within the New Testament. Jewish communities for example were specifically mentioned at Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:9; 3:8,9). Paul encountered Jews and preached in the synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 18:19). There was Jewish influence in the church at Colossae (Col. 2:11) and also in the pastorates (first Tim. 1:6-9; Tit. 1:13,14). Secondly, there is archaeological evidence that supports the suggestion that Jewish communities

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[349] *There were also other such groups and / or institutions which had interesting points of similarity between themselves and the Christian church. An example thereof is the Mystery Religions, see Warden (1986:146). Not all such institutions and groups are of concern here since we are only interested in identifying with groups that would result in the suppression of the church.*

in Asia were stable and prosperous. The synagogue at Sardis, for example, was well known.[350] *Thirdly, Josephus made reference to the settlement of two thousand Jewish families in Phrygia and Lydia.*[351] *Fourthly, ephigraphic and literary evidence confirms a Jewish presence in the following cities: Adramyttium, Pergamum, Thyatira, Magnesia near Sipylus, Blaundos, Sebaste, Sala, Acmonia, Eumineia, Hierapolis, Apollonia, Deliler near Philadelphia and Phocaea.*[352]

It seems evident that the authorities distinguished between the Jews and Christians by the year 64 AD.[353] *However, the two groups resembled each other since both Jews and Christians upheld a single monotheistic creed spawned from the same roots.*[354] *This association between Judaism and Christianity was confirmed when Galen wrote that the followers of Moses and the followers of Christ were people with whom rational argument was a waste of time.*[355] *Some authors make even more of the proposed association between Judaism and Christianity by writing that:*

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[350] *Greenewalt, et al (1983).*

[351] *Josephus Antiquities 12. 147-153. Also see Applebaum who discusses this reference in Josephus (1974-1976:468,469).*

[352] *Applebaum (1974-1976:468,469).*

[353] *Frend (1976:143).*

[354] *Tacitus makes this point quite clear (Frend 1976:143).*

[355] *Statements of this nature appear to show that these two groups, although distinct, were grouped together as far as certain aspects were concerned, if not by themselves most likely by the authorities. Galen's statement can be found in Waltzer (1949:37) who cites Galen's work: de Differentiis Pulsuum 3.*

> *"The real complaint against them (Christians), however, was membership of an unrecognised Judaistic society engaged in spreading atheism and social disruption" (Emphasis mine).*[356]

There also seems to be other similarities between Judaism and Christianity that linked the two groups to each other. Tertullian for example, is of the opinion that some Christians observed the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish laws,[357] *in both groups the virgins veiled themselves, and the twelve lay-elders*[358] *were present in both the church and the synagogues of the west.*[359] *Further reason for Christians being identified with these resident Jews was because the Christian church, at least in the earliest instances, grew out of the synagogues.*[360] *Christians*

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[356] *This view is held by Frend, whom is quoted here, and he substantiates it with the writings of Origen (1976:155).*

[357] *An example of such supposed Jewish law is that the blood had to be drawn before meat may be eaten.*

[358] *Study Frend (1982:25-26) not only on the similarity between the lay-elders and the disciples that number the same in both Jewish and Christian religions but also on varius other similarities. The number twelve also seems to have significance in both the Greek and Roman religions (Ferguson 1977:19-25).*

[359] *Frend (1976:292).*

[360] *Evidence to this effect can be seen in Acts 13:14-; 13:42, 43; 14:1; 17:1-4; 18:4, 8. Clarke in his commentary on Acts 13:14- notes that:*

> *"Paul, was now on a special mission to the Gentiles, yet he availed himself of every opportunity, in every place, of making the first offer of salvation to the Jews" (emphasis supplied) (1931:783).*

thus consisted of a large number of converted Jews. It was easy to confuse the identity of Christians with that of the Jews.[361] *Furthermore, Christians and Jews served the same God. Another similarity was that both groups were involved in proselyting.*[362] *Identification with these Jews would have been negative because:*

a. *We know of some instances of Jews being expelled from Rome. Tacitus refers to a proscription of Egyptian and Jewish rites by Tiberius when he wrote:*

> *"... four thousand descendants of enfranchised slaves, tainted with that superstition and suitable in point of age, were to be shipped to Sardinia and there employed in suppressing brigandage: 'if they succumbed to the pestilential climate, it was a cheap loss'. The rest had orders to leave Italy, unless they*

In 13:42- Paul was not only presenting the gospel once but was invited to do so a second time. Just about all the gentiles came for that second presentation. Both these presentations were held in the synagogue. This is supported by Guthrie (1986:990-991). Also see Guthrie (1986:995; 997); Hengel (1986:185).

[361] *A more detailed discussion on such confusion can be found in Guterman (1951:121,122); Warden (1986:105).*

[362] *Although this is not mentioned in first Peter, baring believing wives to their unbelieving husbands. But even in this case it was their good conduct that did the persuading and not proselytizing activity. Even so, the absence of such activity does not exclude it. See the following works Horace (Satires 1.4.140); Strack and Billerbeck (1922:924). Also read Jesus' stern remark in Matt. 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single* προσήλυτον *(convert), and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (New Revised Standard Version).*

had renounced their impious ceremonial by a given date" (emphasis mine).[363]

b. *Greek negativity about the Jews was evident in frequent attempts to ignore privileges granted to the Jews by Roman authority. So much so that repeated admonitions from the provincial government were necessary to remind cities that the Jews and their customs were to be respected.*[364]

c. *Jews refused to participate in the worship and customs involved in citizenship.*[365]

d. *Jewish separatist practices of strange customs resulted in considerable hostility towards them.*[366]

e. *The conversion of Jews and the use of the synagogues by Christians to proselytize were bound to arouse Jewish hostility. Jewish hostility would have been interpreted by the Greeks and Rome as disorder.*[367]

Not only were there similarities between the Jews and Christians in the eyes of the general populace, but there was also a conscious movement by Christians away from the Jews. This would have led to further persecution as the Jewish faith enjoyed protection as an established religion and they moved away from such protection.

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[363] *Tacitus (Annals 2.85).*

[364] *Sevenster (1975:165).*

[365] *Sevenster (1975:165).*

[366] *MacMullen (1982:40).*

[367] *The confusion and / or identification of Christians with Jews could not have lasted too long. However, this identification, at least to the Greeks, had a negative impact in the Christian image. For more discussions on this topic see Warden (1986:107,108).*