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**A Two-Thousand Year Juxtaposition:
A Case Study Analysis of Persecution in Rome and China**

Name
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Note: Main Headings, and Sub-headings indentation.
If you format the headings in the text of your paper,
the Table of Contents will automatically indent
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For Table of Contents and any other
front matter use lower case roman
numeral numbering. Center at
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Introduction

In the modern western world, specifically in America, the gospel of prosperity and church growth has become prevalent over the past several years. The majority of churches seem overtly focused on how to grow their congregation. Thousands of books have been written on the topic and range in practice from the systematic,¹ to the simple,² to the purpose-driven.³ This desire for church growth in the western world raises the question: What has been the cause of church growth in the history of the church? Two significant times of expansive growth for the Christian church have been found to be in times which the church experienced persecution. These two significant times of persecution are the Roman persecution of the Church from A.D. 249 to 305 and the Chinese persecution of the Church from 1966 to present day.

During both of these periods, the church experienced significant losses in martyrs, destruction of Scripture and sacred places, and demoralization through slavery and prison. Though each time period and the persecutions experienced during each time period is distinctive, the Church saw significant growth in both situations. This leads to the question: Is there a direct correlation between persecution and church growth? This paper will seek to analyze for the Roman and Chinese church (1) the background leading up to persecution (2) the description of persecution (3) the effects of persecution and (4) any correlation between the two time periods of persecution. This case study analysis seeks to find a relationship connecting these two periods of persecution and the resulting growth of the church.

¹See: Richard L. Reising, *Church Marketing 101: Preparing your Church for Greater Growth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

²See: Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*, (Nash

³See: Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth With Mission*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

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Rome Background

The spread of Christianity in the Roman world, prior to Constantine, can be divided into three stages. The preliminary stage begins with the initial general following of Jesus. This stage is often called the Apostolic Age.⁴ During this stage, Christianity was spread mainly between Jewish believers and the Gentiles who were associated with Judaism. Those purporting the faith were frequently individuals who were a part of the group who had personally followed Jesus, or those in direct contact with them.⁵

The second stage begins in the late first century and extends to the end of the second century. During this stage, the spread of Christianity had moved almost exclusively among non-Jews. Though it had spread significantly,⁶ Christianity was still in the minority of Roman society. There had been some persecution by this time, but martyrs were not excessively numerous.⁷

Beginning in the close of the Roman Empire. This disorder caused and hope. Growth during this stage Constantine, the Christian Church was the most influential establishment in the Roman Empire next to the state.⁸

Footnotes should be located at bottom of text (check format by going to Insert; Footnotes; Options and click box for Footnote at bottom of text)
Indent first line of footnote
Single space between each footnote
{note that footnote punctuation is different than bibliography citation punctuation}

⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. Vols. 1-3; reprinted ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 68.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 85. Records show that by A.D. 180, there were Christians in all of the provinces of the Roman Empire and in Mesopotamia.

⁷Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Edited by Henry Chadwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), Book III, Chapter 8. Origen states that by this point, the amount of Christian martyrs could be easily numbered.

⁸Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 68.

When repeating a source non-consecutively do not repeat full citation but rather use Author's last name, Title, page number. (Note full citation in FN 4)

When citing same source consecutively do not repeat citation but rather use **Ibid.**

Within these three stages, ten significant persecutions of the early Church are attributed to the Roman Empire. These persecutions were issued under: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Spetimus, Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian.⁹ Though each persecution affected the Church, there were various degrees of abuse. This work will focus on the empire wide persecutions found in the third stage, specifically the persecutions of Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian.

Persecution

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With the rise of Decius in the year 249, and his subsequent persecution of the Christian Church, a new relationship between the Church and State began. From this point forward, until the rise of Constantine, sanctioned actions were taken by the Empire to eliminate the Church. Between the reigns of the three Emperors discussed here, there were times of peace for the Church, but these times only served as resting periods before another, more severe persecution was to come.¹⁰

The persecution by Decius consisted of an edict requiring every citizen of the Empire to offer a sacrifice to the Roman gods. By taking part in this sacrifice, the citizen would receive a certificate (*libellus*) confirming that citizen's participation in the sacrifice.¹¹ The response by the Christian community was varied, some succumbed to the edict, while others obtained *libelli* by

When using Ibid. with a specific page number note punctuation order. (Ibid., #.)

⁹Ibid., 136.

¹⁰Ivor J. Davidson, *The Baker History of the Church: The Birth of The Church: From Jesus to Constantine AD 30-312: Volume One*, ed. Tim Dowley, John D. Woodbridge and David F. Wright, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 322.; Johannes Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine: The Theological Challenges*, (New York: Roldanus, 2006), 12.; Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 147.

¹¹John R. Knipfing, "The Libelli of the Decian Persecution," *Harvard Theological Review* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1923): 345.; Donald L. Jones, "Christianity and Emperor Worship from Hadrian to Constantine," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 1979): 39.; Over 40 of these libelli have been found. Jones provides an excellent overview of these certificates in an examination of those that have been restored.

impact on the growth of the church, as the Emperors would have hoped. Rather, the Christian community grew exponentially.³¹ Hastings states of the size of the church,

It is hard to say quite how numerous Christians were by the close of the third century and it is easy to exaggerate their proportion within the general population. Perhaps in a few areas they could have exceeded 20 percent, even more in certain towns in Egypt and Asia Minor, but in general the figure must be lower and in most of the west far lower – less than 10 percent.³²

Though these numbers seem low, there was no other comparable religion or civil body of that time. It was this type of recognition, as a cohesive force, that was becoming increasingly threatening to the Empire, and which eventually

Note: When citing a reference that is more than five lines use block quotation. Single spacing, center justified and indented half an inch both right and left. (Format: Paragraph)

legislation put forth by Constantine. In April of 311, Galerius passed an Edict of Tolerance, which allowed the Christians to express themselves as such and restored their meetinghouses.

This unexpected move began a process by which the church would eventually receive official State recognition, government support and gradual involvement in the social life of the Empire.³³

China Background

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The control of religious affairs in China was not an invention of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the middle of the ninth century, the Tang dynasty destroyed independently functioning Buddhist monasteries and from this point on, religion has been regulated and controlled as a department of the state in China.³⁴ The growth of Christianity in China from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 through present day was preceded by significant events, which prepared the Christians of China for the persecution they would eventually face.

³¹Hastings, “150-550,” 35.

³²Ibid., 34.

³³Davidson, *The Baker History of the Church*, 350; Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine*, 1.

³⁴Tony Lambert, “The Present Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party,” *Religion, State & Society* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 121.

reached. Though many do not completely agree theologically with the TSPM and its control of the Chinese churches, it cannot be denied that there are Chinese nationals who are being reached by these government-controlled churches.⁶⁵ There are also many who are being reached by those involved in the underground churches. These individuals love their country, nationality and culture, but do not believe the gospel is being preached to its fullest due to the government's control of the registered churches. It is these churches that kept Christianity alive when the government churches were closed, and they continue to keep Chinese Christianity alive today.⁶⁶

Whether this growth is a direct result of persecution, it is unclear, but in both cases, the church was persecuted in various ways and resulted in great strides in growth and government control. Thus, while there seems to be a correlation between the persecution of the church and the growth of the church, it cannot be concluded definitively, within the parameters of this case study, that persecution will ultimately lead to church growth.

⁶⁵When in China, I was able to speak for a long period of time with elderly woman who attends one of the registered Churches. She had so many questions for me about faith and the Bible. She had read the Bible multiple times through and cherished it. She was a true believer, though she attended the government TSPM church.

⁶⁶Chen, "The Emergence of a New Type of Christians," 197

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Note: Citation Difference from FN: Last Name of Author First. Punctuation Difference

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