

Christianity in Late Antiquity Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Jesus was born in Bethlehem (possibly in about 4 BCE) then crucified in 29 CE. Over the course of the next 350 years, Roman attitudes toward Christianity changed considerably. In the third century CE Christians were viciously persecuted, but by the fourth century Christians were granted freedom to worship. In 380 CE Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. In this lesson you will study laws that granted Christians freedom of belief and worship in the Roman Empire. You will also study the controversy that resulted when the pagan Prefect of Rome wanted to restore an altar to the Goddess of Victory in the Senate House, and Bishop Ambrose of Milan objected.

All Web links for this lesson can be found at:

<http://www.socialstudies.com/ancientlinks.html>

Directions:

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/edict-milan.html> and read the “**Edict of Toleration by Galerius—311 A.D.**”

You may find these definitions helpful:

“caprice” and “folly”—impulsiveness and foolishness

“the institutes of antiquity”—Rome’s traditional religious practices
to “promulgate” a law—to make it known

“mild clemency”—forgiveness

“to grant indulgence”—to allow

1. In Galarius’ opinion, Christians “had fallen into such a folly.” What does he mean by this? What did Christians experience as a result of their “folly”?

2. Galarius grants his “indulgence” to Christians. What did he think the Christians should do in return?

Scroll down and read the “**Edict of Milan.**” You may find these definitions helpful:

“to be propitious”—to act favorably

“His usual favor and benevolence”—God’s grace and kindness

“without molestation”—without being harassed

“without...claim of recompense”—without requiring payment

3. According to the Edict of Milan, what could Christians now do?

4. As a result of the Edict, what was to be restored to Christians?

Symmachus, Relation 3

<http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/sym-amb/symrel3.html>

Read the introduction, then answer the following questions. You may find these definitions helpful:

“sacred rites”—traditional pagan worship

“prerogatives of the Vestal Virgins”—salary and privileges

“parsimonious”—thrifty or frugal

“fillets”—decorative headband

“spoils”—loot

“avarice”—greed

“unassailed”—unchallenged

5. According to paragraph 3, what does Symmachus demand?
6. According to paragraph 9, how did the sacred (pagan) rites protect Rome in the past?
7. In paragraphs 11 and 12, Symmachus writes that the prerogatives (salary and privileges) of the Vestal Virgins (priestesses) have been reduced. What does Symmachus say the Emperor should do instead?
8. According to paragraph 14, what happened when property and rights were taken away from Rome’s pagan temples, priests, and priestesses?

Ambrose, Letters 17 & 18

<http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/sym-amb/ambrep17.html#XVIII>

Read the relevant passages and answer the following questions.

9. According to paragraphs 1–2, to what is Bishop Ambrose replying? What request does Bishop Ambrose make in paragraph 2?
10. According to paragraphs 4–6, does Bishop Ambrose feel that the ancient customs protected Rome? Why or why not?
11. According to paragraphs 11 and 12, does Bishop Ambrose feel that the Vestal Virgins (priestesses) should receive their salaries again? Why or why not?
12. Read paragraphs 20 and 21. According to Bishop Ambrose, why were the Romans still experiencing famine?
13. In paragraph 31, Ambrose gives another reason why the Altar should not be restored to the senate. What does he say?
14. Do you agree with Prefect Symmachus or Bishop Ambrose? Give reasons supporting your answer.