

CHURCH HISTORY VOLUME 02

CHRISTIAN MISSION



THE GROWTH AND
SPREAD OF THE

EARLY CHURCH

WHY DID THE CHURCH TRIUMPH?

- ▶ A small sect of Judaism
- ▶ From an unimportant Roman Province
- ▶ Early followers lacked power, charisma, influence or money
- ▶ Abundance of religions, philosophies, cults, & mystery religions to follow
- ▶ Christianity won & changed the empire



WHY DID THE CHURCH TRIUMPH? (FROM PBS *FROM JESUS TO CHRIST* SERIES)

- ▶ "There is a future for the individual."-*Helmut Koester*, Harvard Divinity School
- ▶ "...what I think the Christians offer probably as well or better than anybody else in the Roman world is a sense of belonging."-*L. Michael White*, University of Texas at Austin
- ▶ "... the reasoning of the Cross,...I think this must have had a very powerful, emotional appeal to people." -*Wayne A. Meeks*, Yale University
- ▶ "And this society was one in which people took care of one another. So that is an enormous element of the appeal of this movement."-*Elaine H. Pagels*, Princeton University

ANDREW WALLS, SIX HISTORICAL-CULTURAL PHASES

- ▶ The Jewish age (*Jewish* practices & ideas)
- ▶ The Hellenistic-Roman Age (*orthodoxy*)
- ▶ The Barbarian Age (*Christian Nation*)
- ▶ The Western European age (the *Individual*)
- ▶ The age of expanding Europe & Christian recession (*cross-cultural transplantation*)
- ▶ The Southern age (*extensive penetration of new cultures*) in Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, parts of Asia

CULTURAL MOVEMENT

- ▶ Judaism
 - ▶ Jewish state disappeared in the wars of AD 70 and 135
 - ▶ Jewish resistance & persecution really makes it a marvel that Christianity survived this phase
- ▶ Gentile world
 - ▶ Antioch (Acts 11:26)
 - ▶ Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
 - ▶ The Apostle Paul



Siege of Jerusalem, *Francisco Hayez*

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

- ▶ “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”-1 Corinthians 1:26
- ▶ The early church began as mostly common or lower class people

ROMAN PHILOSOPHER ON THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

**“LET NO ONE EDUCATED, NO
ONE WISE, AND NO ONE
SENSIBLE COME NEAR.”**

Celsus the Philosopher



**“BY THE FACT THAT
CHRISTIANS ADMIT THAT
THESE PEOPLE ARE WORTHY
OF THEIR GOD THEY SHOW
THAT THEY WANT AND ARE
ABLE TO CONVINCE ONLY THE
FOOLISH, THE DISHONORABLE,
AND THE STUPID; ONLY
SLAVES, WOMEN AND LITTLE
CHILDREN.”**

Celsus the Philosopher

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE CHARGE

**“THAT MANY OF US ARE
CALLED POOR IS NOT OUR
DISGRACE BUT OUR GLORY.”**

Minucius Felix (~170–250 AD)

STATUS OF WOMEN & SLAVES

- ▶ Women & Slaves were accepted as full members
- ▶ They participated equally in the worship of the community
- ▶ For more information, see [Jim Hamilton's article on Slavery, Sexism & the Bible](#)



CALLIXTUS, BISHOP OF ROME

- ▶ In the early 3rd century, we see a former slave, Callixtus, become the bishop of Rome (~217 AD)
- ▶ Callixtus was a former servant and slave
- ▶ He was also the first anti-bishop (also called anti-pope)
- ▶ Elected as the 2nd bishop of Rome in opposition to Hippolytus



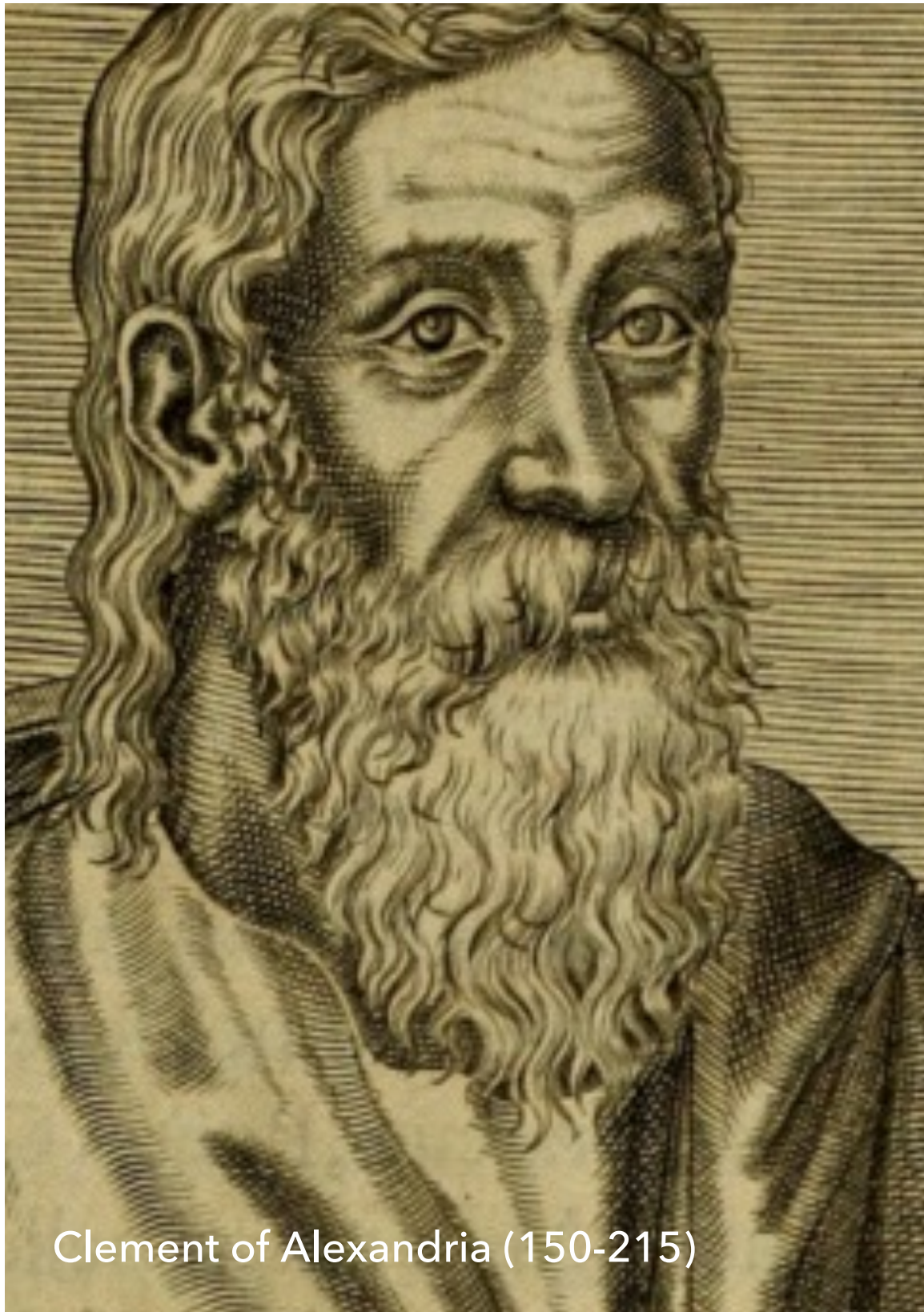
Bishop Callixtus

CHRISTIANITY & NOBILITY, AD 60

- ▶ Philippians 4:22
 - ▶ “All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”
- ▶ There is some evidence that emperor *Domitian’s* (AD 90) cousin & wife were Christians



Bust of Nero



Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

WHAT KIND OF RICH PERSON CAN BE SAVED?

- ▶ Clement of Alexandria wrote a sermon answering the question:
- ▶ Q: What kind of rich person can be saved?
- ▶ A: The person who does not set his heart on wealth and put it first, like the rich young ruler did.

GEOGRAPHICAL MOVEMENT

- ▶ The birthplace of the church stood on the boundary between East and West
 - ▶ To the West
 - ▶ Asia Minor
 - ▶ Greece
 - ▶ Italy
 - ▶ Spain?
 - ▶ Christianity had made it to Gaul (There was a persecution in Lyon, Gaul 177 AD)
 - ▶ N. African Churches in the late 2nd century

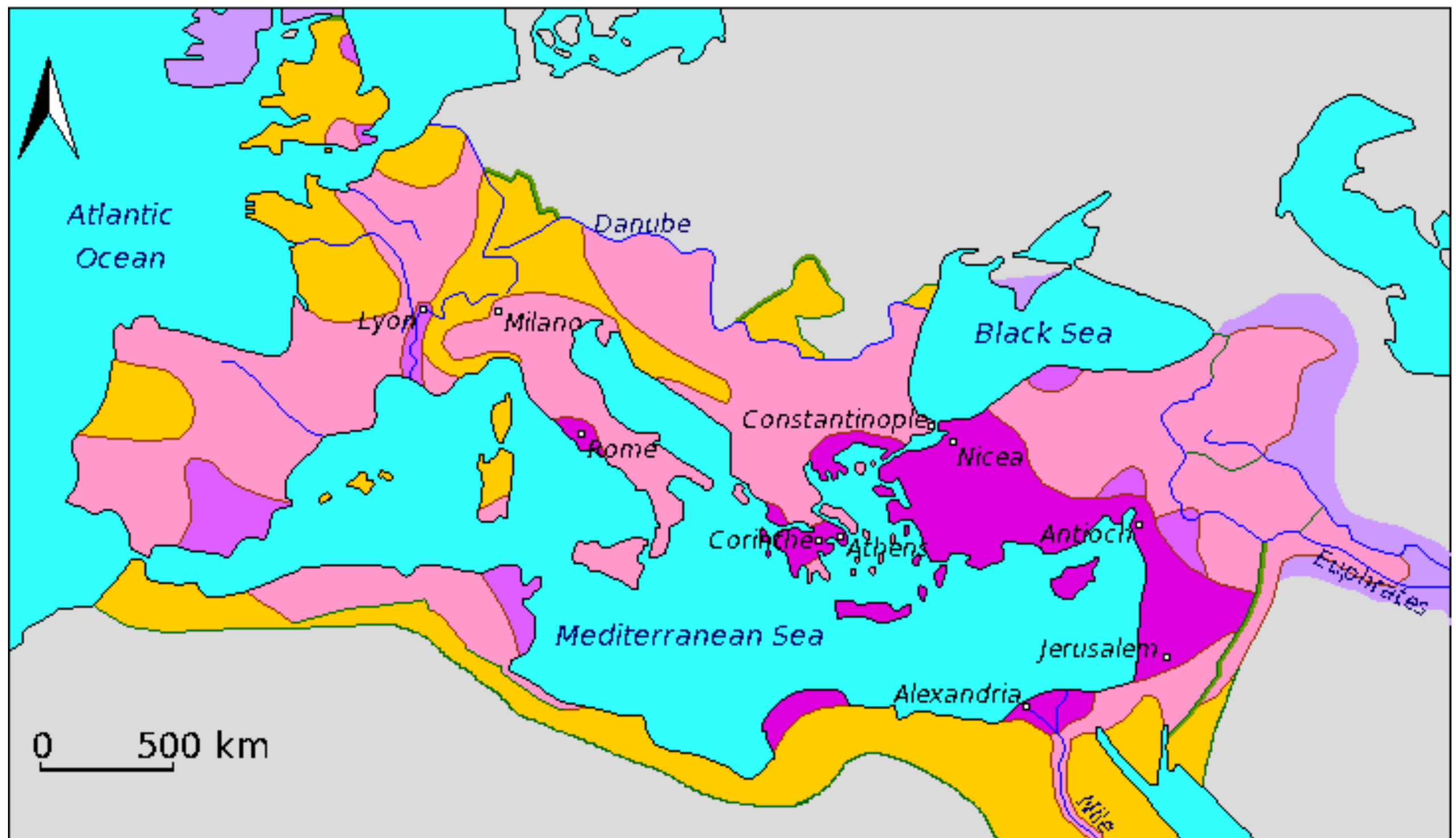
Death of Blandina, Lyon, AD 177



THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH



THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH



- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  1st century |  3rd century |  6th century |
|  2nd century |  Roman Empire (Christian since 313) | |

GEOGRAPHICAL MOVEMENT

- ▶ To the East
 - ▶ The 1st NT translation was in Syriac
 - ▶ The 1st Christian Hymnbook, *Odes of Solomon*, was produced in Syria
 - ▶ 1st Church building was in Edessa
 - ▶ 1st Christian King & State was in Armenia (100 years before Constantine)



Tiridates III, King of Armenia

THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH





Martyrdom of Thomas

THOMAS TO INDIA?

- ▶ Early Traditions have Thomas going to India
- ▶ The *Acts of Thomas* (Gnostic document) in the early 3rd century
- ▶ Saint Thomas Christians trace their lineage back to the 1st century
- ▶ Mostly legendary and fictional account (though it points to an original event)

WHY DID CHRISTIANITY SPREAD? (IT HAD NOTHING GOING FOR IT)

- ▶ Christianity came into a world full of religions
 - ▶ It did not come into a spiritual vacuum
- ▶ Rome had plenty of warring sects and rival faiths
 - ▶ Pagan religions, mystery religions, philosophies and the imperial cult all provided something to meet the “religious instinct”

TRADITIONAL PAGANISM

- ▶ Acts 14:11-And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"
¹² **Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**
¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.



Paul & Barnabas at Lystra

ACTS 19: PAUL IN EPHESUS & THE WORSHIP OF ARTEMIS



- 23 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. 24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. 25 These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. 26 And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. 27 And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

MYSTERY RELIGIONS

- ▶ In contrast to Paganism, It promised a sense of belonging and **personal salvation**
- ▶ Mithras from Persia
- ▶ Isis from Egypt
- ▶ Cybele from Asia Minor



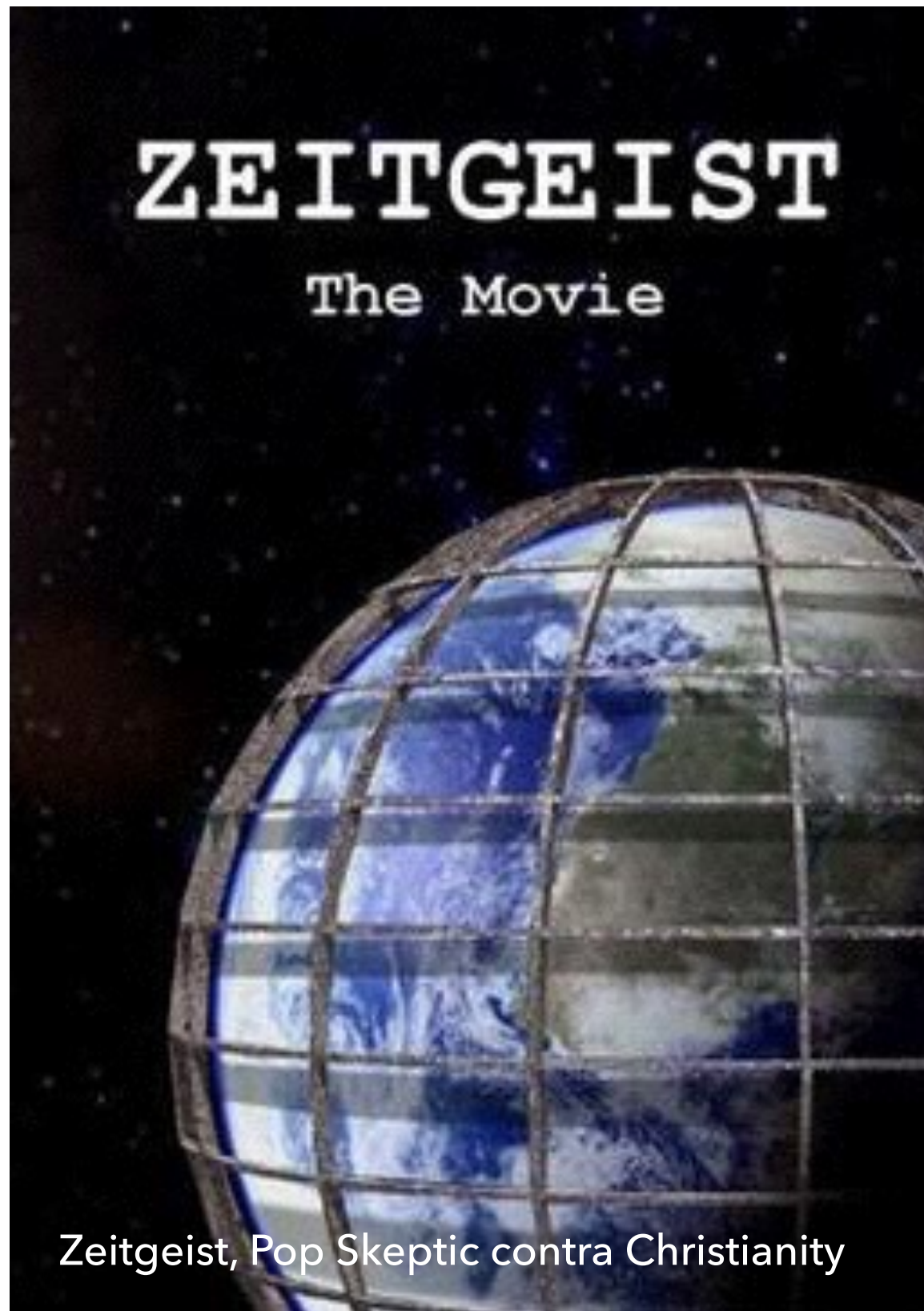
Mithras the "sun god"

MYSTERY RELIGIONS

- ▶ Religious rites involved annual vegetation cycles and natural occurrences like growth, death, decay & rebirth
- ▶ Secret Rites & Initiations
- ▶ No use for doctrine, but rather experience



A representation of Isis



SKEPTICS & MYSTERY RELIGIONS

- ▶ Many skeptics use the mystery religions as examples of how Christianity was cobbled together from multiple sources
- ▶ They would say that every thought, theme, doctrine, and holy day is taken from somewhere else

CULTURE & RELIGION

- ▶ Pagan worship or cult identity was attached to everything
- ▶ Days of the week
 - ▶ Sunday was a day dedicated to worship of the sun, the sun-god
- ▶ In effect, there was not a single day or event that did not have the stain of idol worship and pagan thought



A silversmith selling Artemis statues



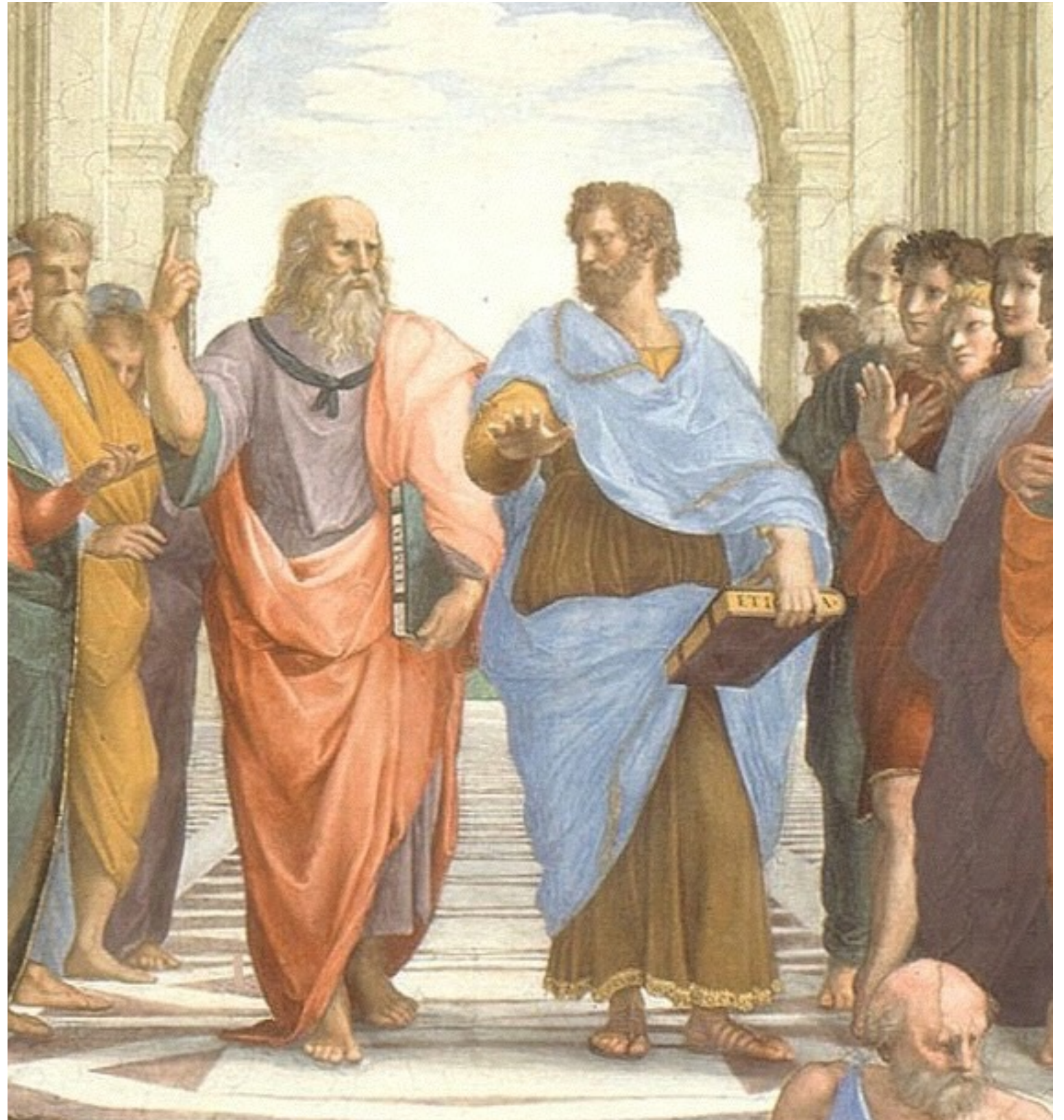
Roman Wedding Scene

...THE CHRISTIAN, ON THESE RATHER INTERESTING OCCASIONS, WAS COMPELLED TO DESERT THE PERSONS WHO WERE THE DEAREST TO HIM, RATHER THAN CONTRACT THE GUILT INHERENT TO THOSE IMPIOUS CEREMONIES.

–Edward Gibbon, on Christianity in the midst of paganism

PHILOSOPHIES

- ▶ In contrast to mystery religions and paganism, moral ethics existed here
- ▶ Stoicism
- ▶ Epicureanism
- ▶ Platonism, etc.
- ▶ These offered rational processes to the discovery of a good life and even, *hope beyond death*



Plato & Aristotle, *School of Athens*, Raphael

IMPERIAL CULT

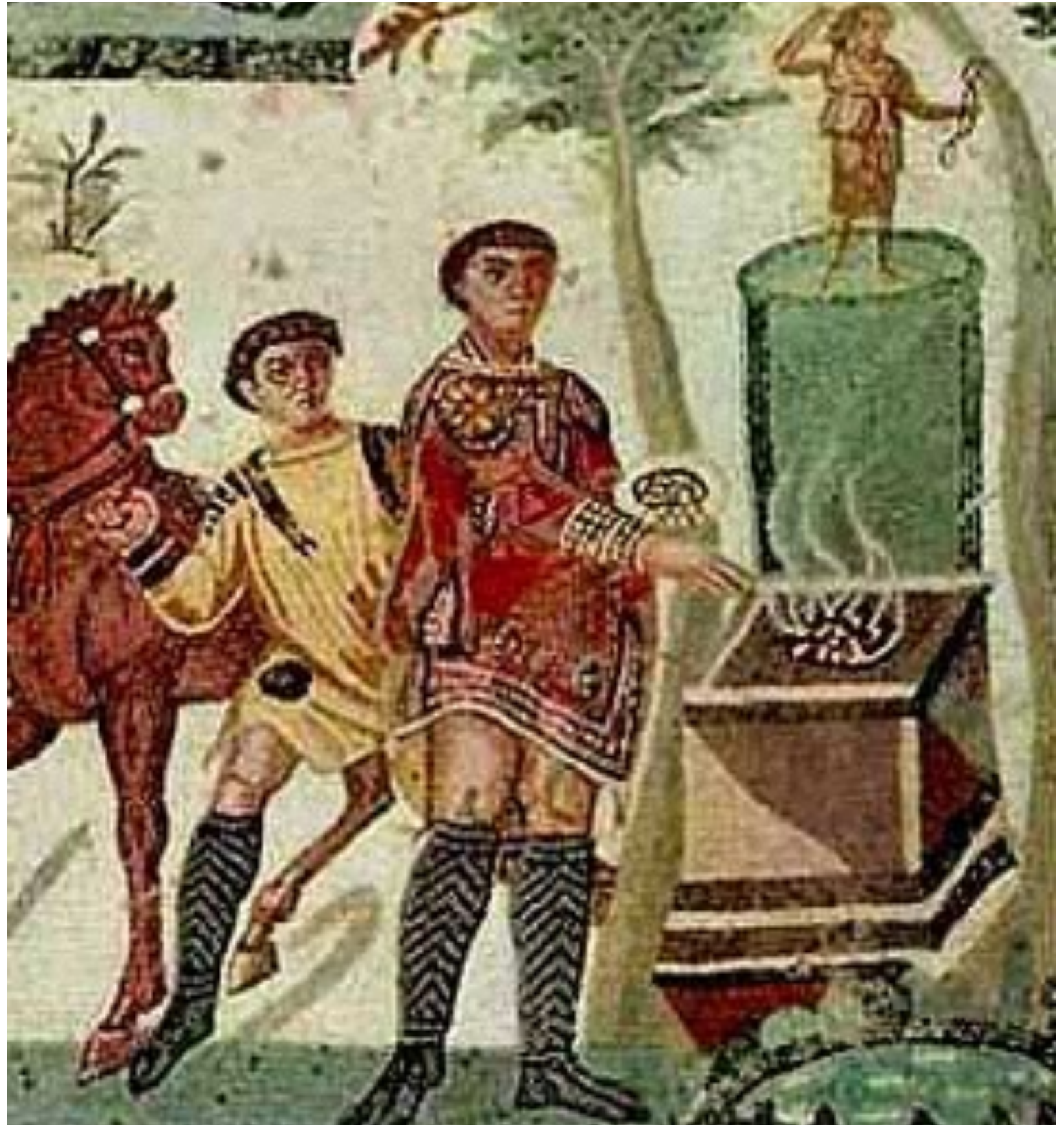
- ▶ Beginning with Julius Caesar, the emperor was deified upon death
- ▶ By the time of Augustus, the living emperor was deified
- ▶ This “worship of the emperor” and “Rome” was the only thing that must be practiced.



Bust of Caesar Augustus (Octavian)

IMPERIAL CULT (CONT.)

- ▶ You must bow before the image of the emperor
- ▶ Take a pinch of incense and burn it before a symbol of the emperor
- ▶ It was a unifying and patriotic act to hold the empire together
 - ▶ similar goal to the saying of the pledge in schools



The burning of incense to an altar of Diana



Roman Wedding Scene

THE VARIOUS MODES OF WORSHIP WHICH PREVAILED IN THE WORLD WERE ALL CONSIDERED BY THE PEOPLE AS EQUALLY TRUE, BY THE PHILOSOPHERS AS EQUALLY FALSE, BY THE MAGISTRATES AS EQUALLY USEFUL, AND THUS TOLERATION PRODUCED NOT ONLY MUTUAL INDULGENCE BUT EVEN RELIGIOUS CONCORD.

–Edward Gibbon



WITH SO MANY OPTIONS...

**HOW DID CHRISTIANITY
SURVIVE?**

CHRISTIANITY CONTRA MUNDUM



Arch of Titus celebrating the destruction of Jerusalem

- ▶ Christianity & Judaism were the only **exclusive** religions of the time
- ▶ They did not mix or co-mingle with the other religions
- ▶ This is "contra" the rest of the world
- ▶ Every other culture or religious sect would freely mix with anything that seemed good



Roman Altar

THE POLITE **AUGUSTUS**
CONDESCENDED TO GIVE ORDERS,
THAT **SACRIFICES** SHOULD BE
OFFERED FOR HIS PROSPERITY IN
THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM;
WHILST THE MEANEST OF THE
POSTERITY OF ABRAHAM, WHO
SHOULD HAVE PAID THE SAME
HOMAGE TO THE JUPITER OF THE
CAPITOL, WOULD HAVE BEEN AN
OBJECT OF ABHORRENCE TO
HIMSELF AND HIS BRETHREN.

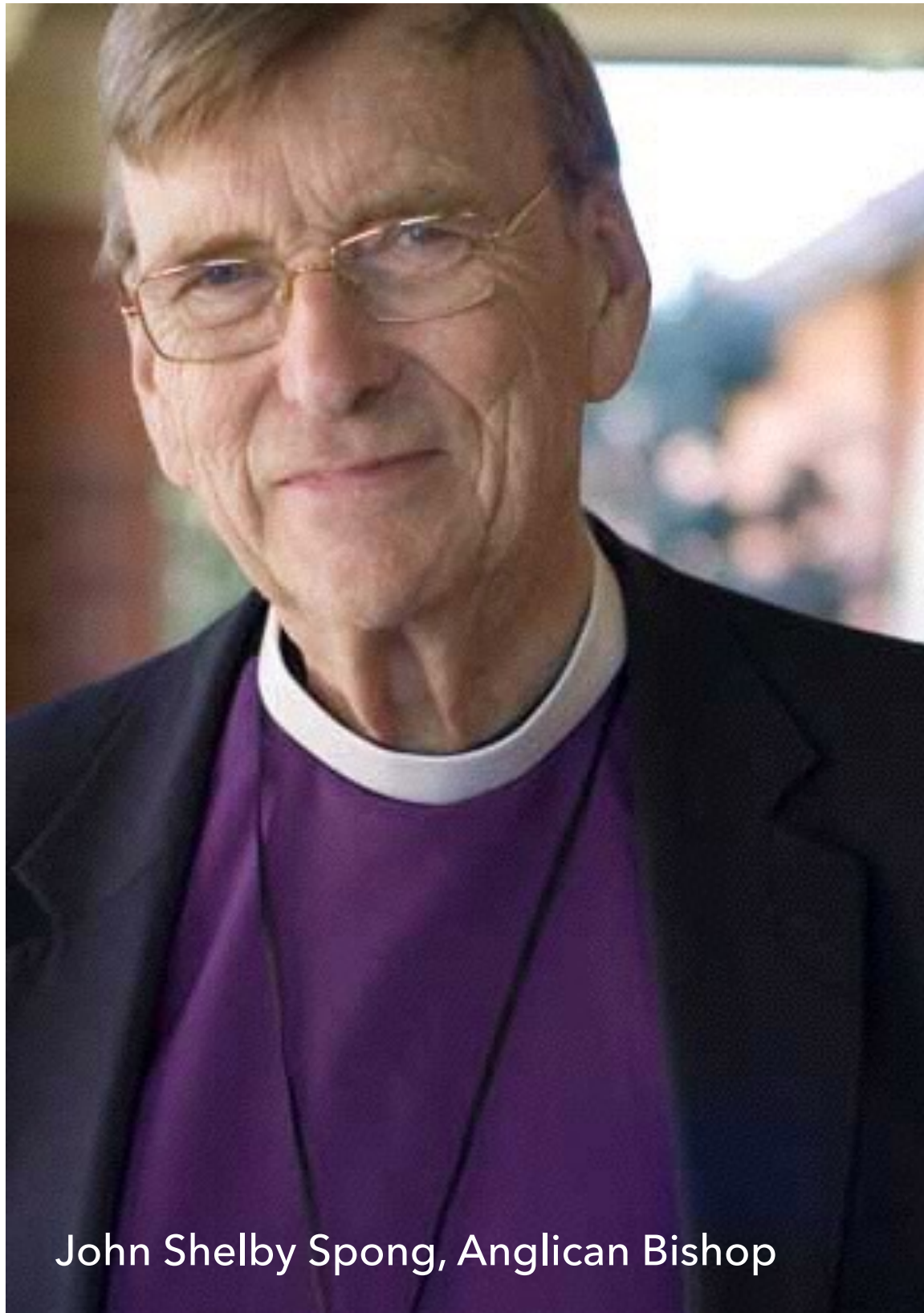
–Edward Gibbon,
no friend of Christianity

CHRISTIANITY & THE WORLD

- ▶ When Christians were taken before judges and magistrates, they were charged with the following:
- ▶ "You do not worship the gods, you do not sacrifice to the emperor."



A roman praetor pronouncing judgement



John Shelby Spong, Anglican Bishop

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

- ▶ Skeptics claim that Christianity must give up its claims to exclusivity
- ▶ It must “Change or Die” if it will survive in a changing world
- ▶ Many people have pursued a Christian compromise with modern culture to make it successful



Rob Bell, Author of Love Wins

CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVITY

- ▶ If Christianity had compromised with society, it would not have survived the first 300 years.
- ▶ Christianity must remain true to its Savior and its Revelation (the bible) if it will survive the current culture

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

- ▶ Not only Paul & the Apostles received the Great Commission
- ▶ Ordinary Christians were missionaries
- ▶ You could say their second calling was that of a *missionary*



Phillip & the Ethiopian Eunuch



Pompeian Road

ROMAN TRAVEL

- ▶ Christian Merchants & Soldiers traveled Roman trade routes & from post to post
- ▶ Roman Peace was a reality
- ▶ "Where the Romans went, there they built roads, paved, well-engineered, running undeviatingly forward over hill and dale."
Stephen Neill

TRAVEL AND SAFETY IN ANCIENT ROME

“TRAVEL WAS SAFER AND MORE RAPID THAN AT ANY LATER TIME TILL THE 19TH CENTURY.”

Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions



CHRISTIAN WITNESS

- ▶ Christians were witnesses in both words and in deeds
- ▶ They were witnesses to their neighbors, business associates & acquaintances
- ▶ They testified before magistrates & judges, & in the midst of colosseums & executions
- ▶ There were no public sermons or revivals



IT IS MAINLY THE DEEDS
OF A LOVE SO NOBLE THAT
LEAD MANY TO PUT A
BRAND ON US. THE
PAGANS SAY, SEE HOW
THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER?
HOW THEY ARE READY
EVEN TO DIE FOR ONE
ANOTHER?

-Tertullian of Carthage



Infant abandonment in Rome

CHRISTIAN LOVE

- ▶ Christians had a love for widows and orphans
- ▶ The oppressed & imprisoned
- ▶ The hungry, thirsty, homeless
- ▶ abandoned children left to die
- ▶ They loved one another and even loved those who persecuted them

40 martyrs of Sebaste



CHRISTIAN DEATHS

- ▶ There are many stories of jailers, magistrates, and spectators in the stands at Christian sentencing and executions
- ▶ They watch Christians as they are martyred, then often join them at that moment
- ▶ Though there were no great rallies or public preaching services, when thousands watched Christians die, that was their opportunity for mass evangelism

MARTYRDOM AS A WITNESS

**“THE BLOOD OF THE
MARTYRS IS THE SEED OF
THE CHURCH”**

Tertullian of Carthage



**“AND I TELL YOU, YOU ARE
PETER, AND ON THIS ROCK
I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH,
AND THE GATES OF HELL
SHALL NOT PREVAIL
AGAINST IT.”**

–Matthew 16:18, ESV

COMING SOON!

CHURCH HISTORY VOL. 03

BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS