

## The Christian Empire

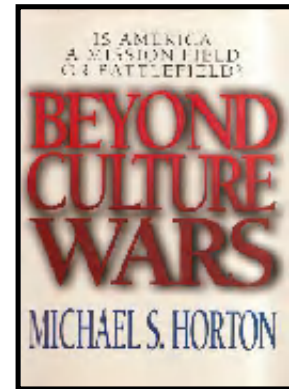
**BEYOND CULTURE WARS** BY MICHAEL S. HORTON

The introduction reminds us that the early believers were instructed to pray for their rulers – though their “rulers” persecuted them, members of *The Way*. The believers did not form a militia or lodge a campaign against the ruthless leaders of the Roman Empire; but instead, “**were enduring persecution as the Savior had**, because of the prize which lay before them, an imperishable crown.”

The author goes further in describing the obedience and reverence of *The Way*:

Even the moral strength of the early Christians was due to motives the average pagan could not understand: “The divergence lay in the Christian stress on the grace of God...(rather than individual’s self-respect)...and on the ongoing activity of ‘charity’ toward one’s fellow men.

He continues to describe the divergence in terms of social-economic mix. The church was noted from the Epistles to have problems indeed, and to exhibit some prejudice toward other nationalities (other than Judaism), **but the early church showed strong evidence of cohesion and interdependence**; thus leading to the charity and basic compassion, one for the other.



The “minor” differences that have lead to a very distributed church of the relative modern day would most likely have been inexistent or matters of indifference in the early days. Basically, the early church was struggling to survive against persecution of unprecedented proportion. Ironically, **the church flourished during such degrees of stress** (historically) and seems to lean toward mediocrity in seemingly “better” times.

Mr. Horton offers some accounts of the early church (in the environment of persecution). One account noted that Christians “did not follow a peculiar manner of life...**They take part in everything as citizens and endure everything as aliens.**” Yet, even with their accepted citizenship, Christians were the targets for human sacrifice; yes, they were sacrificed (like livestock) to the pagan gods.

Not until the arrival of Constantine (312 AD) did the Christians received a respite (from persecution). Still, the Christians were later blamed (by some Romans) for in the fall of Rome according to Mr. Horton’s content – thus leading to the prospect that, while Constantine did offer some change seemingly for the better, **Christians remained in contempt perhaps for longstanding animosity and misunderstanding.**

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More than being held in contempt – or blamed for the fall of Rome – the church had changed for the worse:

By this time, however, **the church had been so favored and had so enjoyed the patronage and wealth of the royal court that Christians themselves had become lazy, worldly, and ignorant.**

A distinction is drawn at this point in the chapter: the city of man (to indicate any earthly city, province or state) is not the city of God (or heaven). Using the description and title of the African bishop, Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* represents that which of God – but is not of man; hence, the City of God and cities of man can never be the same or equal. Mr. Horton elaborates while giving due credit to the creations and civility of man:

...Even pagans (or those who are not believers) can build remarkably sound societies, full of virtues which they inherited as those who are created in God's image. Nevertheless, **it is not only the image of God that we have inherited from our ancestors, but original sin as well,** and so, while civil virtues may account for the grandeur of Greek and Roman civilization, these honorable qualities elicit no divine approval, since the unbelieving heart, mind and will – all in bondage to sin – render true obedience to God impossible.

Augustine thought of the city of man as a “missionary opportunity”; or in other words, that the world, in its fallen state, was an opportunity for Christians to crusade or share the *good news*. Recognizing that the kingdom of God (or city of God) was beyond the present, fallen world; Augustine held that “**man's true end lies beyond this life.**”

Mr. Horton continues in summarizing the “Christian Empire” taking the reader through the Medieval, Reformation and present day of post-modernism. With reference to the earlier works of Augustine, *The City of God*, some application is given to the present day. In that we remain the present world, what must be the purpose or mission of the contemporary church or Christians? In a broad description, he suggests: “**Christians have a duty to be positively engaged in the building of both kingdoms (City of God...and of man) while clearly distinguishing them.**”