**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in Culture and Civilization**

**First year, LMD**

**Rome and Christianity**

The Roman religious beliefs were influenced by the religions of earlier cultures. As Christianity spread throughout the ancient world before A.D. 100, however, Rome tried to control the new religion.

**Rome’s Policy toward Christianity**

In general, Rome tolerated the religious practices of the people it conquered. For example, it did not require Jews to worship the emperor and other Roman gods. However, Rome would not let its subjects’ religions inspire rebellion. For that reason, when a Jewish revolt began in Jerusalem, the Romans destroyed the Jews’Temple in A.D. 70.

**A Christian Threat:** The Christians’ refusal to worship Roman gods was seen as a form of rebellion As more **Gentiles**, or non-Jewish people, joined the Christian movement by converting to Christianity, the Romans felt threatened.

**The Roman Persecutions:** Roman fears about Christianity soon led to active hostility. Some Roman rulers blamed Christians for political and economic troubles. For instance, Emperor Nero accused the Christians of setting a fire that leveled much of Rome in A.D. 64. During the second century, persecution of the Christians intensified. Many were imprisoned or killed because of their religion. Yet more people converted to Christianity.

Other Christians and even some non-Christians regarded the persecuted as martyrs. Martyrs are people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a belief or cause. During the Roman persecutions, Christian martyrs were often buried in underground cemeteries called catacombs. Christians gathered in the catacombs to celebrate the martyrs’ funerals as well as other rituals and ceremonies.

**The Conversion of Constantine**

In 306, **Constantine** became the emperor of Rome. At first, Constantine allowed the persecution of Christians. In 312, Constantine became Christians

**The Legalization of Christianity:** Constantine immediately ended the persecution of Christians. Then, in a decree known as the Edict of Milan, he made Christianity one of the empire’s legal religions. Constantine also built churches, used Christian symbols on coins, and made Sunday a holy day of rest and worship. But Rome’s first Christian emperor delayed his own formal conversion to Christianity until the end of his life.

**Christianity Changes Rome:** In 380, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of Rome. Eleven years later, Theodosius closed all non-Christian temples. **Beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church**

Christianity in Roman cities took on a common structure. Priests obeyed **bishops**, or local church leaders. According to Roman Catholic tradition, Rome’s first bishop was the apostle Peter. Much later, the bishop of Rome would become the most important bishop, or **pope**. This marked the beginning of the **Roman Catholic Church**, a Christian church based in Rome. *Catholic* means “universal.”

To live the ideal Christian life and to celebrate these sacraments together, Christian men and women formed communities called monasteries. Over time, men entered the higher orders of the church, becoming bishops, priests, and deacons. Christianity changed from a small sect into a powerful, wealthy religion.