

**Wolfram Kinzig, *Christian Persecution in Antiquity*,
trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press,
2021), pp. viii + 173. \$29.99**

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Presenting Kinzig's *Christian Persecution in Antiquity* as a 'helpful introduction to the nonspecialists', as the cover-jacket does, is misleading. The book is written for an audience that is sympathetic to Christian traditions. There is nothing wrong with that, but full disclosure should be offered. The only indication that the topic of 'Christian persecution' might be controversial is the mention in the introduction of Candida Moss's book, *The Myth of Persecution* (2013), and the distance that Kinzig 'begs' to take from her treatment of the sources. Significantly, Candida Moss is the only scholar named in the whole book, including the footnotes. Contrary to Moss, Kinzig considers that the sources, mostly martyr narratives, 'basically relate events that actually happened' (p. 4). Kinzig adds for the English translation a brief discussion of the criteria that he uses to 'judge the authenticity of these texts' (p. 5). However, he does not provide a list of texts, though he alludes to 'a kind of canon of martyr acts' (p. 6) for which he refers the reader to the modern collections of texts listed in his 'Further Reading' section. The topic is never brought up again, and martyr acts consistently provide Kinzig with the material for his narrative.

The most common strategy deployed for addressing, or rather for not addressing, controversial issues is to mention that there is a 'debate'. A typical example is the rescript of Hadrian found in Justin's *First Apology*. Kinzig mentions that its authenticity is debated, but then goes on as if it could be taken as authentic and even draws historical consequences from it: 'Such limits on denunciations [stipulated by Hadrian in his rescript] appear to explain why there is no evidence of any lawsuits against Christians during the reign of Hadrian' (p. 51). When writing about the 'debate' on the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome (p. 39), Kinzig wishes to spare the reader from rehearsing the long scholarly discussion in detail, which may seem reasonable in a book written for the nonspecialist. The problem is that the same nonspecialist readers are not presented with the elements of the debate, nor with the possibility to understand what is at stake in order to make up their own mind. Kinzig, however, goes further and indicates that the weight of Christian tradition should outweigh all scholarly discussions. About Peter and Paul he thus writes: 'We cannot here rehearse the scholarly discussion in detail: it will suffice to point out that the veneration of Paul and Peter as martyrs has always attached itself to the city of Rome. There is, therefore, no reason in principle to doubt the claim that both apostles met a violence death in Rome' (p. 39). A more appropriate title for the book, therefore, would be: *The Christian Tradition on the Roman Persecutions*.

The narrative is organised in five main periods. A chapter on the 'marginalization of Christianity within Judaism' ends with Paul's arrival in Rome in 59 CE (ch. 1). Violent Jewish attacks, as attested in the Gospels or Acts, are deemed 'not intrinsically implausible in the context of ancient religious and social conflicts' (p. 16). The next period covers 'The persecutions in Rome under Nero and Domitian' (chapter 4): there is 'little

doubt about the pogrom that was conducted in the city under Nero's watch' (p. 38), and 'no reason in principle to doubt the claim that both apostles met a violent death in Rome' (p. 39), but there was 'no comprehensive persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian (p. 43). The period 111–249 CE (chapter 5) does not know of 'empire-wide persecutions' and Christians are mostly 'victims of local police actions' (p. 45), within the limits imposed by two imperial rescripts, one by Trajan and one by Hadrian. Marcus Aurelius, presented as a 'devotee of Stoic philosophy', lets the situation deteriorate, as illustrated by the martyrdoms of Justin, Polycarp and the martyrs of Lyon. With the Severans, the situation improves except for two 'hot spots of Christian persecution' (p. 69): Alexandria in Egypt, and North Africa with the execution of Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions. The reign of Decius inaugurates the period of empire-wide persecutions divided into the decade 250–60 (chapter 6) and the Great Persecution of Diocletian (chapter 7). The persecutions end as they started: through the decision of an emperor. Though readers are warned against the 'adulatory exuberance' (p. 140) of the Christian sources towards Constantine, they are not offered any alternative explanation.

In addition to these narrative chapters, Kinzig offers four much shorter chapters. Chapter 2 presents the 'Ideological Parameters of the Ancient Conflicts': why Christianity was offensive to pagans and how Christians responded to their attacks. Chapter 3 describes 'Legal Procedures and Punishments'; this chapter is an addition for the English translation and emphasises the cruelty of the tortures inflicted upon Christian martyrs. Chapter 8 dedicates two pages to 'later repressions against certain groups of Christians who had been identified as schismatics' (p. 125). These 'tensions' within the empire turn into 'outright persecutions' (p. 126) outside of it. Thus, chapter 9 evokes the persecutions among the Goths, the Sassanians (Persia) and in Armenia and Georgia. Chapter 10 deals with the 'massive problem for the churches' (p. 133) of the many apostates, i.e., Christians who did not remain steadfast.

Overall, Kinzig's presentation of the Christian tradition on the Roman persecutions is a quick read, much shorter with its 173 in-octavo pages than Frensdorff's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965, with numerous reprints). The question of it being up to date is irrelevant, since critical scholarship is ignored.

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Alexis Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ*

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Alexis Torrance's *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology* is not simply a book on historical theology. Rather, Byzantine theology, with its focus on the humanity of Christ and deification in Christ, is used as a corrective to trends in modern Orthodox theology.