Rome and Christianity

Roman worship was connected to membership in the community: the citizen participated in worship of the state (the "triade capitolina" Jupiter, Juno, Minerva), the soldier in the worship of his body, and the individual in the worship of his family. There were also an ensemble of ceremonies, divinities, and rules that were celebrated by public officials and priests on festive occasions. The right to worship was a part of civil rights, with freedom to profess. Intervention only occurred in the cases of excessive superstition, belief in wizards or fortune tellers, or mutilation ceremonies (as in the case of Jewish circumcision). Particularly strong was the worship of the dead, with burial ceremonies and intercession celebrations held for the *pater familias*.

Roman power was tolerant toward religion, with the exception of cases that resulted in riots, like in 70 B.C. when the Jewish rebelled in Judaea against the rule of Rome after one of their temples was destroyed. The Jewish population was deprived in a large part of the Holy Land. The consequences were various, with the "Zealots" (those with weapons in hand, ready to combat against the "evil" Roman kingdom) and the "Essenes", led by Jesus of the Nazareth and John the Baptist. Given the unstable political determination for a new religion, Rome became more violent, condemning to death those responsible- as in the case of Jesus of the Nazareth. This event initiated the birth of Christianity.

Christianity criticized paganism which was the only official religion until then. Many powerful Romans, pagans themselves, unjustly blamed the Christians for unfortunate events that occurred, such as epidemics, natural catastrophes, or fires (famous was the persecution of Nero who was let off suspicion as the arsonist of Rome by accusing the Christians). Successively, the power tried to control the new religion without repressive or persecutory methods.

In the III century, when Christianity increased its power by gathering believers among the powerful, the "pax romana" favored the expansion of the religion. After a long period of persecution and illegalities, Constantine with the edict in Milan (313 A.D.) gave official recognition of the Christian religion. This began an expansion through doctrinal groups toward the attempt to enforce one doctrine only.

Rome is still the principal seat of Christianity: The Vatican is the State inside the city with today's believers exceeding 1 billion worldwide.